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Ronald D. Crouch

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Running head: SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL INCLUSION

“THEY GOT A SPOT FOR US IN THIS SCHOOL”:  
SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG STUDENTS OF COLOR WITH  
DISABILITIES IN URBAN SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Department of Psychology

DePaul University

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BY

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### **VITA**

The author was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1972. He is the recipient of the Jack Kent Cooke Graduate and Undergraduate Fellowships, and the Truman Scholarship. He is also the recipient of the DUOS award for mentoring an undergraduate student during the dissertation research. He received his Bachelor's degree in Psychology from The George Washington University in 2004. He received his Master of Arts degree in Clinical-Community Psychology from DePaul University in 2006.

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## OVERVIEW

School inclusion is the process of educating students with disabilities in general education settings with appropriate support. It is also an attempt to develop schools into supportive learning communities where all students feel they belong. The nationalization of school inclusion (i.e. IDEA) represents a sweeping, second-order change altering how students are taught, how teachers are trained, and the policies and priorities of schools. Prior research indicates that while students and teachers approve of inclusion, both groups face a variety of obstacles when it is put into practice. Additionally, research suggests that the transitions that often take place as a part of inclusion may threaten the belonging that inclusion is intended to create. This study examines the obstacles to school inclusion among 163 students with disabilities and 110 of their teachers in 23 public schools in a large urban school district in the Midwest. Students and teachers were asked what issues they faced during a district-wide process to increase inclusion. Additionally, they completed quantitative scales to assess school belonging and supportive and stressful social interactions. A data transformational mixed-method approach was used to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data from teachers and students. Questions of interest focused on what obstacles to inclusion emerged, how they effected school belonging, and how these issues were (or were not) resolved. Qualitative and quantitative data and student/teacher perspectives were also compared and contrasted. Results suggest that there are five overall areas in which issues arise: academic, social, accessibility, school climate and school system/community issues. Results show

that both students and teachers are keenly aware of students' sense of community in their schools, and that the obstacles faced in the transition to school inclusion do have a negative impact on school belonging. Mixed agreement and disagreement was found between student and teacher perspectives. While teacher and student ratings of school belonging and social support were correlated, ratings of social stressors were not. Comparison of qualitative and quantitative data showed a great deal of correspondence between the data types, in particular, transformed qualitative data indicating negative experiences negatively predicted school belonging. It was found that actions were taken to address each of the five issues that arose during the transition to inclusion, but that the actions were not of a single type. Rather actions taken to address issues came from multiple actors in the school and involved a variety of strategies, from one-on-one tutoring to collaborating with bus drivers. The results suggest five overall findings. First, it appears that there are specific issues that do arise when making the transition to school inclusion (academics, social, accessibility, school climate and school system/community issues). Second, it appears that school inclusion is an ecological phenomenon. The issues and actions taken to address them occurred at multiple levels within an ecological system rather than just in the classroom between the student and teacher. Third, the actions taken to address the issues that came up in the transition and students' descriptions of their transition experience suggest that student/teacher relationships are key to a successful transition to inclusion. Fourth, social issues are of vital interest to students in their transition to inclusion and are therefore critical to understand. Finally, the results suggest that



school belonging, which has received a great deal of attention in the inclusion and education literature, is a critical component of inclusion and warrants the attention that it has received in the literature.

A strength of this study is the multiple perspective mixed method approach taken in the research design. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the transition to inclusion, particularly as it occurred for both teachers and students in the same classroom. Additionally, this study mixed data types in unique ways that have not been attempted in prior research, allowing for a richer understanding of the perspectives and constructs of interest. A weakness of this study was a lack of longitudinal data, which would have aided in establishing cause and effect relationships. Additionally, there is a lack of academic data and parent perspectives in this study, which the literature suggests are important aspects of school belonging and school inclusion more generally. The findings of this study have several implications of theory and practice. The results affirm the ecological conception of school inclusion and emphasize the importance of understanding inclusion from both student and teacher perspectives. The mixed method approach adds to the literature on school inclusion, which includes calls for more mixed method studies. In terms of practice, the findings of this study suggest that when planning for a transition to inclusion there are specific issues that can be planned for, and that because these issues are ecological in nature, planning should be ecological as well. Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that transitions should include teacher trainings that focus on forming supportive student/teacher relationships that encourage belonging.

**“THEY GOT A SPOT FOR US IN THIS SCHOOL”:  
SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG STUDENTS OF COLOR WITH  
DISABILITIES IN URBAN SCHOOLS**

School inclusion is a process in which students with disabilities are taught in general education classrooms with the supports needed to learn outside of special education settings (Daane, Beirne-Smith & Latham, 2001). However, school inclusion is not only an intervention in classrooms, but also a social movement to give students with disabilities equal opportunities in education. With roots in the Civil Rights and Disability Rights movements of the 1960s and 70s (Blachett, Mumford & Beachum, 2005; Charlton, 1998; Dunn, 1968), school inclusion has become a broad international movement. The school inclusion movement is grounded in the belief that equitable access to education is a fundamental right for all people (UNESCO, 2006), and that access alone is a necessary but not sufficient condition for inclusion. In order for genuine inclusion to occur, schools need to be transformed into supportive communities in which all students feel they belong (Allen & Schwartz, 2001). Inclusion, therefore, is not simply a classroom change, but a larger ecological change that transforms school environments to create a greater sense of community among all students.

A problem with school inclusion that has continued to plague educators is that the egalitarian aspirations that embody school inclusion are often not realized when it is carried out in classrooms (Delisle, 1994; Hollowood, Salisbury, Rainforth & Palombaro, 1995; Kauffman, 1995). As a result, there is controversy as to whether inclusion can in fact be realized and some researchers in special

education believe that inclusion is unattainable in practice, or merely an “illusion” (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995, p.5). Indeed research on school inclusion has shown that while many stakeholders agree with inclusion in principle, far fewer are confident that it can be realized in practice (Harrower, 1999; McLeskey, Hoppy, Williamson & Rentz, 2004).

What problems discourage teachers and other stakeholders, leading them to believe that school inclusion cannot be practiced? Are there encouraging opportunities available for students and teachers when inclusion is attempted? Research has not yet fully explored the problems that frustrate the inclusion process or the opportunities that encourage inclusion. A number of studies have been conducted; however, these studies do not fully examine important elements of the inclusion process. For example, few studies examine problems with inclusion from the perspectives of both teachers and students in the same classrooms, or from the perspectives of other school staff such as counselors. Even fewer studies utilize mixed methods, which is the recommended approach for inclusion research (Li, Marquart, & Zercher, 2000). Additionally, most research on school inclusion does not emerge from the field of community psychology, which emphasizes sense of community and ecological change. In order to understand why a multiple-perspective, mixed-method inquiry would be the best study design for sense of community in school inclusion, an overview of school inclusion is necessary. **A History of School Inclusion**

### **The Disability Rights Movement**

School inclusion is one product of the Disability Rights Movement (DRM). The DRM emerged in the 1970s and has been defined as an affiliation of disability rights advocates, groups, and organizations (Charlton, 1998; Mezey, 2005) which have as their goal the empowerment of people with disabilities (Malhotra, 2001). One of the chief tenets of the DRM is that disability is not an individual problem, but rather, disability is a situation in which society fails to adapt to the needs of all individuals, no matter how diverse (Hahn, 1988; Malhotra, 2001). Therefore, the goal of the DRM is to reverse the prevailing paradigm that focuses on helping individuals adapt to society (termed the “functional limitation view”), and instead place the focus on society’s need to adapt to all individuals (the “minority group view”; Hahn, 1988).

The efforts to change the prevailing deficit or limitation paradigm, and adopt a minority view of disability started in the late 1960s. Protests were held at inaccessible polling stations, wheelchair roadblocks halted inaccessible public buses, and sit-ins were held at state capitols to raise consciousness about disability issues (Charlton, 1998). In addition, lawsuits were brought against government agencies that did not provide accessible services (Fleisher & Zames, 2001). These efforts culminated in a number of legislative victories for the DRM, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which echoes the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 (Blachett, Mumford & Beachum, 2005). In 1990, the DRM achieved a critical victory when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed. For many, the ADA represents the greatest achievement of the DRM, because it provides a relatively

sweeping legal protection. However, it has been compellingly argued that the courts have failed to interpret the ADA broadly enough to protect significant numbers of people with disabilities, and that there is still much work to do to protect their civil rights (Mezey, 2005).

### **Disability Rights in School: A “Silent Revolution” in Education**

As the DRM was pushing forward in society at large, one of the most important changes taking place occurred in public schools. Prior to the efforts of the DRM, many students with disabilities were educated in segregated settings (i.e. special education schools), if they received an education at all (Charlton, 1998; Dunn, 1968). Advocates for disability rights pursued an agenda of equal access in education, and modeled their arguments on the civil rights movement. They advanced the view that there is no legitimate “separate but equal” education for students with disabilities. Within the field of education, two seminal articles forwarded this view, and examined segregated special education through the lens of the civil rights argument (Deno, 1970; Dunn, 1968). The Deno (1970) article argued that the “social capital” of being in a general education class is critical for student success, and Dunn (1968) argued that having a separate “special” education system for some students was unnecessary and amounted to the same kind of segregation rejected by the Supreme Court. These articles influenced a generation of educators to consider the possibility that students with disabilities may actually be in segregated education, and to consider the social learning that builds social capital in general education classrooms (Morse, 1995). On the legal front, two state cases used the logic of the *Brown v. The Board of Education*

ruling to argue for equal access to education for students with disabilities: *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. The District of Columbia* (Blachett, Mumford & Beachum, 2005). The rulings in these national and state cases supported the idea that separate education for students with disabilities violated the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment. These rulings paved the way for national legislation granting equal access to public schools for students with disabilities.

In 1975 Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in subsequent renewals. The IDEA introduced “mainstreaming” into the lexicon of education. Mainstreaming involved placing children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) in schools whenever possible. The LRE clause allowed for students with disabilities to have access to general education classrooms, and for a few students, the least restrictive environment meant being in the same classrooms as children without disabilities throughout the school day. However, during the 1980s most students with disabilities were not placed in general education classrooms and those who were placed in classrooms with non-disabled students were there for just a brief portion of the school day, often without adequate supports for learning and inclusion (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995). Studies of mainstreamed students during this period showed mixed outcomes leading to doubts about the efficacy of mainstreaming (Sammel, Gerber & MacMillan, 1995).

Critics of the practice of mainstreaming voiced their concerns in publications and to legislators (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995). For some, mainstreaming

eventually became a euphemism among some educators for placing students with disabilities in classrooms without adequate supports (Lehmann, 2004).

Throughout the 1990s the phrase “mainstreaming” was replaced by “school inclusion” to signal a change in attitudes toward the prevailing practices, and a shift to the view that students with disabilities should be placed in general education classrooms most, if not all, of the school day (Lehmann, 2004). Today, the term “full school inclusion” refers to the practice of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms at all times while also providing them with the supports that they need to learn and be fully included there (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2001). While “full” school inclusion is far from realized in most schools, there is an ongoing and incremental shift toward greater inclusion nationally and globally (Brusling & Pepin, 2003; Villa, Kluth & Thousand, 2001). This effort to become more inclusive in education, despite being slow and incremental, has transformed the philosophy of education. It has introduced dramatic changes in the day-to-day experiences of students and teachers. For this reason school inclusion has been described as a “silent revolution” in education (Fleisher & Zames, 2001).

### **School Inclusion Today: From Ideology to Implementation**

#### ***A Philosophy of Community and Belonging***

Traditional special education is based on the view that a separate “special” environment is needed for students with disabilities because they are unable to adapt to general education environments (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005). School inclusion, however, reverses this ideology. It is based on the view that

general education learning environments (i.e, general education classrooms) must adapt to the needs of all students, including students with disabilities (Barton & Armstrong, 2003). This view informs the most recent iteration of school inclusion used in schools and described in the education literature. Current definitions of inclusion tend to describe it as an effort to transform schools into supportive communities. Successful inclusion is often described as a condition in which students feel a sense of belonging to their school communities (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; McCleskey and Waldron, 2000; Solomon, Schaps, Watson & Battistich, 1993). Allen and Schwartz (2001) stated this social view most clearly in their definition of inclusion, “Inclusion is not a set of strategies or a placement issue. Inclusion is about belonging to a community—a group of friends, a school community, or a neighborhood (p. 4)”. Many scholars have emphasized the community aspect of school inclusion, focusing on the importance that all people in the school feel belonging to the school community, whether they are students or staff. For example, Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin and Williams (2000) wrote that “...inclusive communities are designed to surround all participants- students, families, educators, administrators, staff, and others – with the support and encouragement to nurture a strong sense of belonging” (p. 7). The view that inclusion is essentially about creating supportive communities has been articulated clearly by Stainback and Stainback (2000), who describe school inclusion this way:

“An inclusive school is one that educates all students in the mainstream...  
But an inclusive school goes beyond this. An inclusive school is a place



where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met” (pp. xi).

School administrators and teachers have been influenced by the scholarly emphasis on building a supportive school community as a key goal of inclusion and this influence is clear in the language of inclusion used in schools. For example, a school that has published their inclusion policy on the Internet states, “Inclusion is about encouraging a sense of community and belonging... A child is ‘included’ when they are viewed an equal partner in the school community” (Gourley, 2008). This focus on transforming the school environment to include all students places the concept of sense of community front and center in the inclusion movement as it is practiced in schools.

### **Sense of Community and Community Psychology**

Sense of community is a central concept for the field of community psychology, and what is meant by “sense of community” is a question with rich theoretical roots. Many definitions of community have been proposed (Bess et al, 2002), and as early as 1955 sociologists had identified 94 different definitions of “community” (Hillery, 1955). In his groundbreaking book *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology*, Sarason (1974) argued persuasively for a field within psychology that had sense of community at its core. Sarason (1974) defined sense of community as “the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving or doing for others what one expects

from them, and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure” (p. 157). McMillan and Chavis (1986) have made substantial contributions to the research on sense of community and define it as “a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met by the commitment to be together” (p. 9). Though there are many definitions and models of sense of community (Fisher et al, 2002), what they all have in common are the core characteristics of a place, structure or shared concern (e.g. a school, a neighborhood, an online chat room, status as HIV positive) around which a group of people affiliate (develop relationships, network, take on responsibilities) and a feeling of belonging or membership (have feelings of identification, social cohesion, a sense of “home”; Fisher et al, 2002).

In Sarason’s (1974) original call to make sense of community core to community psychology, he emphasized that it is a construct that is specific to context and should be appreciated as unique to the people, places and relationships under investigation. Since then many other researchers have reiterated and validated Sarason’s assertion (Bess et al, 2002). Because sense of community is context-specific, it will look different depending on who is participating in research. For example, sense of community among a group of adult first-generation immigrants moving to a new country is going to be different than sense of community among African-American students with disabilities moving into a new school. Researchers in the field of community psychology have emphasized the need to adopt methods and measures for sense of community

that are appropriate and sensitive to the context of participants. Researchers from multiple disciplines have advanced the use of qualitative methods or mixed methods as appropriately sensitive to context when studying sense of community (Fisher et al, 2002). In many cases, this contextual sensitivity of the research means that how sense of community is studied (whether qualitatively or quantitatively) and what is studied as sense of community (what measures are used and what questions are asked) can vary between studies.

Despite the emphasis on context, some standardized measures of sense of community have been developed and the most widely used is the Sense of Community Index (SCI: McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The SCI breaks sense of community into four dimensions: membership, influence, needs fulfillment and shared emotional connection. While the SCI is widely used, it has come under criticism for limiting the definition of sense of community and not being sensitive to certain contexts (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999; Dunham, 1986; Hill, 1996; Sonn, Bishop & Drew, 1999). For this reason some researchers have opted to select measures based on the population and setting rather than use the standardized SCI (Fisher et al, 2002). For example, in a nationwide study of sense of community in school among adolescents in Italy, Vieno and colleagues (2005) found the SCI to be a poor fit for the school context. The researchers pointed out that some items were more appropriate for adults in a neighborhood setting, which is the group the SCI was originally developed to examine. As a result of this critique, Vieno and colleagues developed a measure of sense of community that focused primarily on

the needs of adolescents in a school setting, and which placed school belonging at the center of the study.

Sense of community among adolescents differs in significant ways from adults (Pretty, 2002). Prior research on sense of community among adolescents has found that adolescents do indeed have a strong sense of community, but that it is focused more on belonging as a function of identity development than with adults (Pretty, 2002; Pretty & Chipuer, 1996; Laurent, 2001). Among students, particularly adolescents, a sense of community may have special developmental significance that does not resonate in the context of adulthood. Adolescence is a period of serious consideration about who one is and with whom one wishes to affiliate. It is a developmental stage marked by greater involvement in social networks beyond the family and by a myriad of new social choices and social stressors (Goodenow, 1993; Pretty, 2002). For adolescents with disabilities, who have historically been socially marginalized and segregated in one of the most important social institutions in an adolescents' life (i.e. school), developing a sense of community may be particularly critical for positive identity development. For research to study sense of community among adolescents with disabilities in a school setting, sensitivity to the historical and social context is critical. In particular, because students with disabilities have been historically marginalized in school settings, research must be sensitive to the need to feel included by peers and teachers rather than marginalized, and to have a sense of belonging or identification with the student's school. Additionally, for students of color with disabilities, who may face multiple marginalizations, a sense of community may

be even more important for overall wellbeing. A focus on the supportive and stressful elements of the social environment may be appropriate when researching the experiences of these students.

### **Sense of Community as a Strategy for Success**

For teachers and administrators interested in the needs of students with disabilities, the focus on community belonging as central to school inclusion is a useful strategy for creating overall student success. Feeling that one belongs to a community has been identified as an important human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) for the wellbeing of youth in societies that provide universal schooling (Anderman, 2002; Goodenow, 1993). Belonging in schools has also been linked to critical markers of student success such as school satisfaction, peer support, academic achievement, academic motivation, school attendance and self-esteem (Anderman, 2002; Fisher et al, 2002; McMahon et al., 2008). Sense of community in school is both an ideological and practical aspect of school inclusion that provides teachers and administrators a goal upon which to direct their efforts. For teachers, in particular, creating an environment of a supportive community within the classroom is a crucial step in making school inclusion a reality for students with disabilities. However, the act of creating this environment is not a simple task and is therefore the subject of many teacher manuals on inclusion (Hammeken, 2000; Lehmann, 2004; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005; Stainback & Stainback, 2000). A key ingredient for creating a supportive school community for students with disabilities is a positive and supportive relationship

between the teacher and the student, as this relationship sets up the model for support (Schaffner & Buswell, 2000).

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

Studies of sense of community among adolescents reveal that relationships with key adults, particularly parents and teachers, play a critical role in developing a strong sense of community (Pretty, 2002; Pretty & Chipuer, 1996; Laurent, 2001). Research with students with disabilities in schools has revealed that receiving social support, particularly in relationships with teachers, plays an instrumental role in fostering sense of community in school. Students with disabilities have reported feeling greater belonging when teachers are “encouraging and supportive” and when they have had positive interactions with their teachers (Doubt & McColl, 2003). Additionally, researchers have found that sense of school community can be hindered by overall exclusion and lack of socialization with peers and adults at the school. Students have reported increased belonging when teachers were perceived as “understanding”, and when they felt that they were treated equably in class (Tennant, 2000). Moreover, in a study of student beliefs about school belonging, a key indicator of sense of community in school, many students connected feelings of belonging with the way they were treated by their teachers in class (Nichols, 2008).

These studies point to the importance of student relationships with teachers, and the critical importance for teachers to accurately understand the difficulties and needs of students with disabilities. Overall, research supports the focus that schools have had on developing a supportive school community as a route to

increasing school inclusion. The literature suggests that relationships with teachers can promote or diminish students' sense of whether they belong in their school communities. As an ecological intervention to create a supportive school community, efforts toward school inclusion would do well to focus on opportunities to create supportive student/teacher relationships. From a research perspective, understanding inclusion in depth requires an understanding of the problems that hinder student/teacher relationships, and the opportunities that foster them. To best understand the problems and opportunities in developing student/teacher relationships, an investigation that includes both student and teacher perspectives is most appropriate.

### **School Transitions and Challenges to School Inclusion**

The transition in education philosophy and practices toward increased school inclusion and belonging has also been matched by a more concrete physical transition for students. In order to more fully include students with disabilities, students are frequently moved from segregated environments into new classrooms, and at times into new schools, where they can more often receive an education alongside general education students. While a body of literature on school transitions exists, it has rarely focused on transitions associated with inclusion or on students with disabilities (Booker, 2006; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Long, MacBlain & MacBlain, 2007; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). What makes this gap in the literature such an issue is that the research points to the possibility that transitions are linked with negative academic and social outcomes for students. Research with general education

students has shown that transitions can be risky for students, and may threaten the very gains that inclusion is intended to develop, particularly school belonging (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Long, MacBlain & MacBlain, 2007; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). This link between transitions and school problems may signal that when students transition to inclusion, the transition itself may evoke obstacles to student success.

The potential deleterious effects of school transitions on students' development of a sense of belonging to a school community is worrisome. Belonging is not only a key element of inclusion, but has also been identified as an especially critical need for students who are marginalized by virtue of being a minority in their school (Booker, 2006; Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Therefore, school belonging may be essential for students who experience discrimination, something with which students with disabilities are all too familiar (Charlton, 1998) and for whom students of color with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable. There is little research on school belonging among this understudied group. The problems that occur for students of color with disabilities following a transition need to be understood better than they currently are. In particular, the effects of transitions on important outcomes like school belonging need more investigation.

### **A Community Psychology Approach to School Inclusion**

School inclusion may be best investigated with a community psychology approach. Research in community psychology stands out in psychology for a concern about social justice issues (Rappaport, 2005), which are of particular



importance when investigating school inclusion. Community psychology is a field which expands the focus of psychological theory and research beyond the individual and into the physical, social and cultural environment in which the individual functions. The expanded focus in community psychology, called an “ecological” perspective (Kelly, 1968), locates the phenomenon of interest within a social and historical context, which has been described as the dominant insight of the field (Hess, 2005). Tebbs (2005) described the philosophy of community psychology as following a set of principles that value context and multiple perspectives. These principles include an emphasis on both internal and ecological validity, a science that is applicable to a diverse array of people including those who are marginalized, and “critical multiplism” (p. 214), or a reliance on multiple methods in research. Of particular focus in Tebb’s (2005) proposed principles is the need to view the phenomena of study from multiple perspectives and with multiple methods. A multiple perspective, multi-method approach is particularly helpful because in order to best approximate the “truth” of a phenomenon, it must be understood from diverse perspectives, a principle Tebbs describes as “perspectivism” (2005, p. 214).

A community psychology approach is well suited for a study of inclusion because school inclusion is inherently ecological. It is focused on creating a sense of community, takes place within a critical social and historical context, and is rooted in a social justice movement. Inclusion is ecological in that it does not only affect students, but also the broader school environment including teachers, the classroom and the school as a whole. School inclusion policies and mission

statements that describe efforts to transform schools into supportive communities for all students speak to the ecological nature of school inclusion. School inclusion takes place within a social justice movement that is a reaction to the social and historical marginalization of students with disabilities in education and the broader culture. Inclusion represents a change to this socio-historical context that may have broad and lasting affects on individual students, schools and their larger communities. The principles of community psychology as outlined by Rappaport (2005), Tebbs (2002), Kelly (1968) and many others fit well with an examination of school inclusion. School inclusion is ecological and affects a marginalized group. Researchers in multiple fields have touted inclusion as a phenomenon that is best studied with multiple methods. For these reasons, this study of school inclusion takes a community psychology approach that is ecological and multi-method. In particular, this study of school inclusion takes a multiple perspective approach and includes the voices of both teachers and students.

### **Multiple Perspectives of Inclusion: Teachers and Students**

#### ***Teacher Experiences of Inclusion***

Research shows that teachers have some important difficulties with school inclusion that need to be better understood. Teachers tend to endorse school inclusion in principle, believing that it is a value that fits with the mission of education and is a worthy aspiration for schools (McCleskey & Waldron, 2000). However, since the beginning of the movement toward inclusion, teachers have expressed a consistent apprehension toward carrying it out in practice.

Professional teaching organizations such as the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers have issued resolutions in response to perceived problems with school inclusion (Salvia & Munson, 1986). Such apprehension is clear in the tone and content of teacher manuals for inclusion, such as Lehmann's (2004) *Surviving Inclusion* which is described as a book "...built on the frustrations felt by many general education teachers" (p. v).

Research has shed some light on teachers' frustrations with inclusion. In a review of the literature on school inclusion, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found that two thirds of teachers support the concept of inclusion, but only one third felt that they had sufficient training necessary to carry it out. In addition, the authors found that teachers were more wary of inclusion with students who have more severe disabilities (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). These findings suggest that it may be a lack of training on how to implement inclusion in their classrooms that leads teachers to be apprehensive about inclusion, and other research appears to support this interpretation. In a study of 162 randomly selected general education teachers, Jobe, Rust, and Brissie (2004) found that favorable views of full inclusion were positively correlated with the amount of training teachers had in the actual implementation of inclusion. Salvia and Munson (1989) also found that teachers were more willing to accommodate students with disabilities as a function of their self-perceived competence to do so, and those with more training had higher confidence. In a study of 271 student teachers who received training on how to implement school inclusion, it was found that teachers became more favorable toward school inclusion after receiving a semester of training on

inclusive practices and hands-on mentoring in inclusive classrooms (Nevin, Cohen, Salazar & Marshall, 2007). However, in a survey of 94 regular education teachers, Coates (1989) found that teachers were skeptical that full inclusion is possible even when provided with additional consultation, training and support in the classroom.

Overall, the balance of the research suggests that a primary obstacle for teachers is a lack of preparation for how to implement inclusion and handle the unique issues that may arise in the classroom when working with students with disabilities. However, when closely examined, the research appears to be limited by a lack of information on how teachers' experience these issues with specific students in their classrooms. There is a lack of information on teacher perspectives of student sense of belonging to a school community when attempting to implement inclusion. Also, there is a lack of information on teacher-student relationships from the teacher perspective. This information would be particularly useful because it would help activists, administrators and researchers pinpoint the barriers teachers face when including students with disabilities, and take steps to remove them. A review of the literature revealed just two studies that linked teacher experiences with inclusion and the specific challenges they faced when attempting to serve specific students. The first is a qualitative case study that examined teacher attitudes regarding the difficulties of including a second-grade student with a cognitive disability. It found that the teachers struggled to modify the curriculum appropriately. They believed that a "specialist esoteric pedagogy" (p. 48) was needed and felt unable to attend to the student's needs in a

typical-size class (Ring & Travers, 2005). The second inclusion challenge study quantitatively examined the perceptions of 92 special education teachers' difficulties serving students with disabilities ( $N = 103$ ) in Vermont public schools (Suter & Giangreco, 2009). The study found that special education teachers believed their caseloads were too high to manage and that they were frequently assigned students who had disabilities outside their expertise. Additionally, the study found that special education teachers filled multiple roles as trainers and administrators and these responsibilities reduced the amount of time that they could work with students (Suter & Giangreco, 2009). With only two studies of teachers speaking to inclusion problems with specific students, many of the studies lack sufficient context to understand why teachers have mixed feelings about inclusion, and how to help them and their students. Research is needed that asks teachers to explain what specific issues they have faced when attempting to include specific students in their classrooms.

### ***Student Experiences of Inclusion***

In a review of the literature on school inclusion, it was found that student research focused primarily on observations of social interactions, academic outcomes, peer ratings and outcomes for able-bodied peers (Harrower, 1999). Among those studies that have looked at students and school inclusion, the findings show that like teachers, students have a complicated and mixed experience of inclusion.

In a study that examined the barriers to inclusion as perceived by students with disabilities and their parents, it was found that the barriers fell into four

overall categories: physical environment, intentional barriers (teasing and bullying), unintentional barriers (lack of understanding of disabilities) and physical limitations (Pivick, McComas & LsFlamme, 2002). The study was qualitative, and used focus groups of 10 students and 12 parents to investigate inclusion in 8 Canadian schools. The study identified that physically getting into the school and getting around in the school was a “major problem” (p. 101) for students. The study showed that basic aspects of accessibility such as a lack of ramps and narrow doorways had a deleterious impact on students’ sense of being included in their schools. In particular, students pointed out that elevators were difficult to use and were slow to be repaired, and this created great difficulty for them. Further, the Pivik et al. (2002) study showed that social issues such as teasing by peers, and a lack of understanding from peers as well as teachers created a barrier to inclusion. Students suggested that teachers received more specialized training in disabilities and show greater sensitivity so that peers could model the behavior. In a qualitative case study of a student with a cognitive disability transitioned into an age-appropriate elementary school, it was found that the student felt included and happy, declaring “I love this school” (Ring & Travers, 2005, p. 46). In another qualitative study of nine students with disabilities included in general physical education classes, Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, and Van den Auweele (2002) found that students appreciated some aspects of inclusion, such as having opportunities to participate in activities with able-bodied peers. However, the authors also found that students sometimes felt alienated and disempowered by attempts to modify tasks, particularly when

students perceived that the modifications made the task very different from that which able-bodied students did (Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, and Van den Auweele, 2002). Another qualitative study of the experiences of seven teenage students with disabilities included in general education classrooms examined students' sense of belonging to a school community specifically. The researchers found that belonging was limited by peer exclusion and self-exclusion (Doubt & McCall, 2003). The same study also found that belonging was facilitated by social support from peers and teachers. These studies suggest that students' experience of belonging is negatively influenced by the problems (peer and self exclusion, inappropriately modified tasks) and positively influenced by the opportunities (participation with able-bodied peers, social support from peers and teachers) in the school.

The overall findings of the studies on student experiences of inclusion are mixed. Students described inclusion in terms of both problems and opportunities, and report that both basic problems (lack of accessibility) and more nuanced problems (teacher and peer lack of understanding) stand in the way of full inclusion. The complexity of student inclusion experiences suggests that more research is needed to understand what students experience in inclusive classrooms, and how these affect their sense of community in school. Additionally, most of the studies that include student perspectives are qualitative, but student perspectives on the problems and opportunities of inclusion may be too complex and situational to accurately fathom with one approach. Research on

student perspectives that utilizes multiple methods is needed to obtain a broader and deeper understanding of the experience of inclusion.

### **Critiques and Controversy Over School Inclusion**

A critique of the inclusion literature is that it focuses heavily on philosophical issues at the cost of the practical considerations of implementation (Polloway, Epstein & Bursuck, 2003). Manuals for implementation do exist (Hammeken, 2000; Lehmann, 2004; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005); however, these manuals suffer from a lack of empirical data on the problems that arise during the process of implementation and how they can be solved. More empirical information on the problems that arise during the transition to school inclusion may help school administrators and planners to because anticipating and preparing for transitions to inclusion.

Outright critiques of school inclusion are actually not very common, and a review of the literature reveals that for the most part educators agree with inclusion or have mixed opinions. However, there is a small group that argue that inclusion is bad for education. For example, it has been argued that students with disabilities are unable to receive adequate services in general education classrooms. Morse (1995) argued that students in special education are exposed to an especially nurturing environment in which there are low student to teacher ratios and highly skilled professionals. He explains that when inclusion is implemented these qualities are lost, because general education teachers simply do not have the needed training and the environment is not nurturing for students with special needs. This critique is a good fit with teachers reported concerns that



they do not have sufficient training and are concerned about providing services for students with more severe disabilities. Interestingly, Morse does not address the obvious response that teachers can receive training and that efforts could be made to make general education classrooms a nurturing community for all students, which is the current focus of school inclusion efforts.

Another argument against inclusion proposes that it diminishes the status of special education and therefore diminishes teachers' ability to meet the needs of their students. Hallahan and Kauffman (1995a) have gone so far as to argue that early articles proposing inclusion have "the seeds of ideas now having the potential to destroy the field [of special education]" (p.60). In a case study of collaborative teaching between a special education and general education teacher, Hallahan and Kauffman (1995b) found that the students saw the special education teacher as a helper rather than as a teacher. Students therefore stopped listening to his directions, and when a student was given an instruction from the special education teacher he exclaimed "you're just the resource teacher" (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1995: p. 13). Behavior problems followed, and students with disabilities began acting out. Eventually the behavior problems became so disruptive that the students with disabilities were removed, along with the special education teacher. Hallahan and Kauffman propose that this is a typical case in which two earnest and capable teachers find themselves unable to work effectively for their students, and conclude that the problem is that inclusion diminishes the effectiveness of special education teachers.

Another argument against inclusion is that it has the opposite of its intended effect because it actually isolates students more than special education. In a study of an inclusive classroom, Taylor, Asher and Williams (1987) found that students with disabilities were viewed as shy, avoidant outsiders in the class. Interestingly, the findings of this study focused on sociometric data collected from teachers and peers. The data collected from students with disabilities themselves showed that while some of them felt socially anxious in their new classrooms, they did not feel especially lonely or isolated. These contrasting findings suggest that while peers and teachers may not have been comfortable with the students with disabilities, the included students themselves were adjusting. This contrast suggests that a complex story was unfolding in the classroom, and points to the need to examine student and teacher perspectives with multiple methods. Perhaps students and teachers were interpreting social interactions or obstacles to inclusion differently. More information on student and teacher views of the context would be helpful in understanding this difference in perspectives.

These critiques of inclusion are helpful because they highlight some of the problems that can emerge in inclusive settings. Teachers can have difficulty knowing what to do for their new students, and the classroom needs to adjust along with the students with disabilities in order to become more nurturing for all students. Special education teachers may find it difficult to find a role within an inclusive setting, and this role confusion may generate overall problems in the classroom. Teachers and peers may view students with disabilities as outsiders, and this view may hinder students' sense of community in school. All of these

problems however, have been poorly studied for a number of reasons. The handful of studies cited here mostly point to potential problems occurring in case studies and single classrooms, but little has been done to empirically study what problems are common across schools, students and teachers. The great majority of reports on these problems are anecdotal and used to support philosophical, rather than practical, arguments (Polloway, Epstein & Bursuck, 2003). Another problem is that students' own experience of these problems is rarely considered in study design, so there is very little data from students themselves about the problems that come up. The exception is the Taylor, Asher and Williams (1987) study. Their results showed that students with disabilities themselves viewed the situation very differently than did their peers or teachers. Finally, while these studies reveal problems when implementing inclusion, they do not indicate what was done, if anything, to address these problems. Identifying problems is important, but identifying viable solutions is a logical next step that is often missing in the literature. Additionally, a focus on problems is likely not enough to fully understand the process of inclusion and so there is a need to examine what opportunities occur along with the problems. These gaps in the literature suggest that much more needs to be done to understand the problems that occur in inclusive classrooms and what efforts are made to solve them.

### **Rationale**

School inclusion is a movement to create supportive school communities where all students can feel that they belong. It has quietly brought sweeping change to schools across the country. Some promote inclusion as a noble effort

akin to the civil rights movement (Jobe, Rust, & Brissie, 2004). However, others argue that inclusion is a misguided change in education. Inclusive settings cannot provide students with disabilities the support and attention they need and students may be further isolated in the process (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995). Arguments for or against inclusion can often become focused on the philosophy of inclusion, and the practical issues of implementation may get ignored (Polloway, Epstein & Bursuck, 2003). Given the importance of school inclusion, a better understanding of the practical issues associated with implementation is needed.

### **A need for a multiple perspective community psychology approach**

To best understand the issues associated with the implementation of school inclusion, a community psychology approach is appropriate. Community psychology offers a set of principles that fit well with the study of inclusion. These include foci on sense of community, social justice, ecological change, multiple perspectives and multiple methods. The perspectives of both students and teachers are needed when studying inclusion; however, there are few studies that include both student and teacher perspectives. Those studies that do include both perspectives have found differences in perspective that suggest a complex and important story may be unfolding. This is a gap in the literature where, if studied, important understandings could be gained on how to best create a supportive school community. Differences and similarities between student and teacher views of inclusion may provide fresh insights into the inclusion process. In particular, what is needed is a comparison of student and teacher views on the same inclusion process in the same classroom. A comparison of student and

teacher views in the same classroom would be sensitive to the school and classroom context and findings may open new lines of inquiry for education and disability researchers. This approach is consistent with both the philosophy of school inclusion as an ecological intervention, and with the principles of community psychology, which complement the overall philosophy of school inclusion nicely.

### **A need to focus on belonging to a school community**

Sense of community is a key construct for both community psychology and school inclusion, and may be particularly important for students of color with disabilities, who face a context of historical social marginalization. However, the bulk of the research investigates students' sense of belonging to a school community with general education samples rather than with students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Researchers have recommended that school belonging, a key indicator of sense of community among adolescents, be studied among more diverse samples (Booker, 2006; Newman, Newman, Griffen, O'Conner & Spas, 2007). The great majority of studies of school belonging that do include students with disabilities are qualitative. While qualitative studies are important and necessary to grasp the complex experiences of this unique population, a quantitative approach would be useful. In addition, research examining school belonging has been limited by a lack of data on the teachers' perspectives of their students' belonging to the school community. Researchers of school belonging have repeatedly recommended attaining school staff perspectives of belonging (Anderman, 2003; Booker, 2006; Freeman, Anderman

& Jensen, 2007). To best study school inclusion, a focus on school belonging as a gauge of sense of school community is needed.that includes data on belonging from both students and their teachers. .

### **A need to examine school transitions more closely**

Research also shows that school belonging is negatively impacted by the kinds of transitions that are often part of school inclusion; however, few studies have directly examined the effect of such transitions to inclusion on school belonging. Additionally, most research on school transitions focus on students without disabilities. The research that has been done has found that among non-disabled adolescents, transitions negatively affected school belonging. It is likely that transitions can have the same effect on students with disabilities. It is even possible that, as some critics of inclusion have proposed, a transition to school environments that are not solely focused on serving the needs of students with disabilities will have a negative effect on students. More needs to be done to understand how the transitions that are often associated with school inclusion impact students' sense of belonging to their school communities.

### **A need for mixed methods**

Mixed-method approaches have been an interest of inclusion researchers and have been recommended as a useful approach for the study of inclusion (Li, Marquart, & Zercher, 2000). Mixed methods provide the possibility of identifying significant relationships among key constructs for inclusion, such as school belonging and student-teacher relationships, while also understanding these relationships with the narrative descriptions of participants. Despite the potential

of mixed method approaches, only a few studies have investigated school inclusion with a mixed methodology (Marquart, Li & Zercher, 1997; Nevin, Cohen, Salazar & Marshall, 2007; Staub, 1995).

This study seeks to address these limitations in the literature by examining the issues that students and teachers experienced with school inclusion following a school transition with a mixed method, multiple perspective, ecological approach. This study examines school belonging and student/teacher relationships following the transition of students with disabilities into more inclusive learning environments. The transition is investigated from the perspectives of both students and teachers using qualitative and quantitative data from both groups. The reports of both groups are examined for consistencies and inconsistencies in the problems, opportunities, solutions, sense of belonging and social interactions that occur following the transition. In this way, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of how transitions to school inclusion, and the obstacles and opportunities that come with such transitions, affect the prospects for the development of a sense of community among students of color with disabilities from low income communities.

### **Statement of Guiding Questions**

This study compares quantitative and qualitative data from both students and teachers on the process of inclusion following a school transition. The problems and opportunities encountered in the classroom, students' sense of school belonging, supportive and stressful social interactions, and efforts made to address problems are all assessed. This data is examined to discover how students

and teachers experience school inclusion, to get an understanding of how transitions affect sense of community, and to gain practical insights into the barriers both groups face. Therefore, the guiding questions focus on the problems reported by students and teachers and differences and similarities in their perspectives on those problems. The questions also focus on the differences and similarities in the types of data examined (qualitative and quantitative). The effects that inclusion problems have on student belonging and relationships, and the way in which the problems were addressed are also a focus of the guiding questions.

*Guiding Question I: What problems do teachers encounter when attempting to include students with disabilities in their classroom?*

*Guiding Question II: What problems do students with disabilities encounter when being included in general education classrooms?*

*Guiding Question III: To what extent do the problems and opportunities encountered by students and teachers affect students' sense of belonging to their school community?*

*Guiding Question IV: To what extent do student and teacher perspectives on the problems with inclusion confirm or contradict each other?*



*Guiding Question V: To what extent do the quantitative and qualitative data converge and diverge?*

*Guiding Question VI: What actions have been used or proposed to address the problems encountered by students and teachers when implementing school inclusion? To what extent have these actions addressed the problems?*

## **CHAPTER II: METHOD**

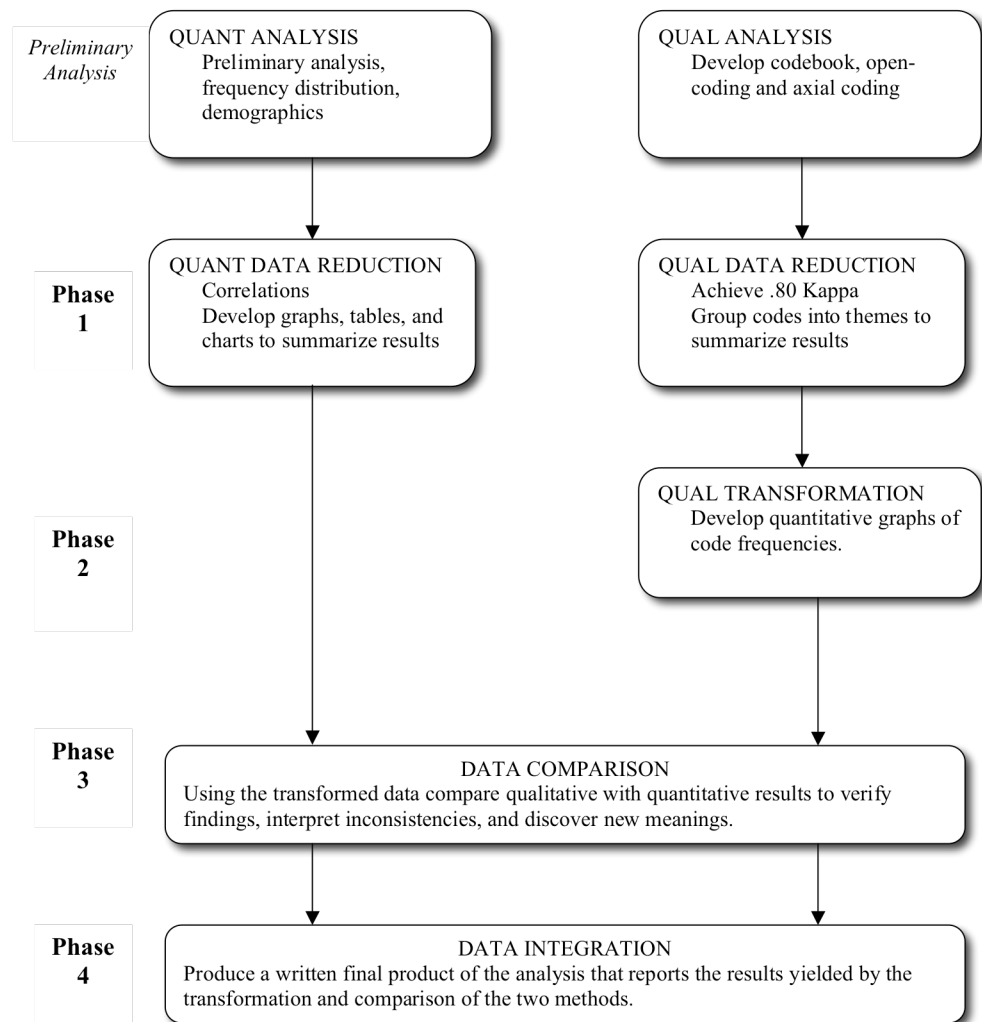
This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach. Mixed methods have been recommended as a valuable way of studying school inclusion (Li, Marquart, & Zercher, 2000), and define an approach that has benefited prior studies of school inclusion (Marquart, Li & Zercher, 1997; Nevin, Cohen, Salazar & Marshall, 2007; Staub, 1995). Researchers using mixed methods to study school inclusion have promoted the approach for helping to anchor statistically significant quantitative results in meaningful narrative relationships, while improving the generalizability of qualitative approaches (Nevin, Cohen, Salazar & Marshall, 2007). Among researchers who study school inclusion, mixed methods have been a topic of interest. The literature suggests that mixed-method approaches show great promise for capitalizing on the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods (Li, Marquart, & Zercher, 2000; Marquart, Li & Zercher, 1997).

Green, Caracelli and Graham (1989) outlined five purposes for conducting mixed method research when investigating and evaluating school policies and procedures. The first purpose in the Green, Caracelli and Graham (1989)

framework is *triangulation*, which seeks to find corroboration, convergence or correspondence of results from different methods. The *complementary* purpose for using mixed methods seeks to elaborate, illustrate or clarify results from one method with the other. *Development* is using the results of one method to develop the other. For example, the results of a qualitative analysis can be used to develop survey questions, or quantitative results can suggest areas for qualitative investigation. *Initiation* is an approach that attempts to discover new perspectives with the hope of recasting the questions or results found when using one method with the questions or results found in another. *Expansion* seeks to increase the explanatory power of a study by extending the range of inquiry with different methods. The primary purpose of using mixed methods in this study is to find corroboration and convergence, and therefore a triangulation approach is utilized.

Creswell and Clark (2007) outlined four variants of the triangulation approach: the convergence model, the data transformation model, the validating quantitative data model and the multi-level model. The approach used for this study is the data transformation model, in which qualitative data are transformed into quantitative frequency counts. Creswell and Clark (2007) described the model in four stages (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Phases of the Data Transformation Model



Before the first stage of the data transformation model, both qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed separately in preliminary analyses. In the first stage, *data reduction*, the data are reduced to thematic groups of codes (qualitative) and graphs, charts and tables (quantitative) to facilitate analysis. In the second stage, *data transformation*, procedures are used to transform qualitative data to quantitative. This transformation is done by calculating the

frequency of qualitative themes. While quantitative data can be transformed to qualitative in theory, it is rarely done in practice (Creswell & Clark, 2007). A possible reason for this is that quantitative data is “transformed” in a sense in the results and discussion sections of research manuscripts, when the quantitative results are explored in more depth in the text and then compared and contrasted to the findings of other studies. Therefore, in this study the data transformation that to be added to the usual results and discussion will be done by counting the frequency with which codes emerge in the qualitative data. In the final two stages, *data comparison* and *data integration*, the data are then “triangulated” or mixed. The data is compared by examining similarities and differences between the findings in each data set. The results of the previous steps of analysis are used to address the guiding questions, in a process of integration.

The data transformation model facilitates the comparison, interrelation, and further analysis of the two data sets. It is an especially useful approach when there are similarities in the qualitative and quantitative data that aid in transformation and comparison. In this study, several units of analysis are similar because the qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the same participants at the same point in time within the same schools. There are a roughly equal number of participants and an equal number of schools in both the qualitative and quantitative data sets. With so much overlap among the data sources in the qualitative and quantitative data sets, data transformation would be a useful approach that would aid in the comparison. Using a data transformation

model in the proposed study will allow for a deeper, richer examination of the transition to school inclusion.

## **Participants**

### **Context**

This project utilized qualitative and quantitative survey data collected from 110 teachers and 163 students from a large Midwestern school district. Teachers provided information on 137 of the 163 students in the study. The district closed a school that served primarily students with disabilities for the urban area, and transitioned the students from that school into neighborhood schools that did not specialize in disability. The transition occurred for a number of reasons, such as the age and condition of the school building, and to include students with disabilities in general education settings. As part of the planning for the transition the school district enlisted the aide of researchers at DePaul University to collect information on key issues that arose and on student success and difficulties. Data was collected from students in 23 schools approximately three months following the transition (which started at the beginning of the school year after the closure of the school). The procedure for data collection from teachers allowed the participants to return surveys when they completed them in the time they had available, therefore teacher data was collected over a longer period of time; three to five months after the transition. Because teachers completed surveys on a subsample of the students (137 out of 163), some analyses in this study compare students and teachers as two distinct groups (all 163 students to all teachers) while

others compare teacher responses to the responses of the specific students in their class.

### **Teachers**

The 110 teachers participated in the study by completing 160 surveys on 137 individual students. Teachers described themselves as general education teachers on 15 surveys (9%), on 59 surveys they described themselves as special education teachers (38%), 1 survey was completed by a case manager (.01%), 4 surveys were completed by itinerant or “citywide” teachers (2%), 2 surveys were completed by classroom aides (1%), 2 surveys were completed by school social workers (1%), and 53 surveys were completed by respondents who simply described themselves as “teachers” (33%) without specifying whether they specialized in special or general education. On the remaining surveys, 26 (16%), respondents did not answer what their job title was on the survey. The term “teachers” was used to characterize these school employees given the relative dominance of a teaching function for the roles of great majority of these respondents.

The teachers generally had a good knowledge of the student with a disability that transitioned into their class. Of the 132 surveys in which teachers indicated the frequency of contact that they had with students, the majority had contact with the student “daily” (110, 83%). Teachers responded that for nine students (7%) the contact was “almost daily,” 10 (8%) had contact “weekly,” and 3 (2%) had contact “monthly.” Demographic information was collected from student participants; information on teacher demographics was not collected.

### **Students**

Of the 163 students who participated in the study, 115 provided demographic information. Of the 111 students who reported on their gender, the majority identified as male (62, 56%), and a minority identified as female (49, 44%). The great majority of the 111 students who reported ethnicity identified as African American (87, 78%), 21 (19%) identified as Latino/a, 2 (2%) identified as white, and 1 (1%) identified as Asian. The students ranged in age from 11 to 21 years old with a mean age of 16.51 years. Students in the sample also ranged from the 5<sup>th</sup> (N = 1, 0.6%) to the 12<sup>th</sup> (N = 36, 22%) grade, with the mean grade in high school (M = 10.52). The school district in the study classified students into four categories depending on disability: none, mild, moderate and severe. Mild disabilities include those disabilities that require the least intervention and medical assistance such as learning disabilities. Moderate disabilities include those disabilities which require significant physical assistance, such as a wheelchair, but which do not require a full time aide. Severe disabilities include cognitive and physical disabilities which require a full time aide and substantial intervention, such as severe mental retardation. Of the 110 students who reported information on disability, there were 19 (17%) regular education students, 11 (10%) with mild disabilities, 64 (58%) with moderate disabilities, and 16 (15%) with severe disabilities.

### **Measures**

#### **Qualitative Measures: Problems and Problem-Solving with Inclusion**

Qualitative data were collected from teachers with four open-ended questions to which teachers gave written responses. The questions were designed to elicit information on the issues that have come up in the inclusion of the recently transitioned students with disabilities in the respondent's class (Appendix A). The questions that the teachers answered were: 1) What issues have come up for this student during the transition from [school name deleted] to the current school? 2) How have these issues been addressed? 3) What is the current status on these issues? 4) What positive things have you noticed regarding this student during the transition from [school name deleted]?

Students gave written answers to three open-ended questions regarding their transition (Appendix B). The questions were designed to elicit problems that the students were facing in their new schools, and the positive aspects of the transition as well. The three questions were: 1) Please describe the 2 best things about your move from [school name deleted] to your new school. 2) Please describe the 2 worst things about your move from [school name deleted] to your new school. 3) What things would you like to have changed at your new school?

### **Quantitative Measures: Sense of Community**

To examine the sense of school community for the recently transitioned students, two measures were used. The School Sense of Membership scale was used to examine students' sense of belonging in their new schools, and the Social Stressors and Resources Scale was used to collect information on the social connections and interactions that students were experiencing in their new schools.

### **School Belonging**



The construct of school belonging was examined with the Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993). The Sense of School Membership Scale is a 19-item measure developed and validated by Goodenow (1993). Goodenow (1993) tested criterion group validity using a contrasted groups procedure, and the scale was found to distinguish between 301 urban middle school students who were rated on social standing by their teachers. Student scores on the school belonging measure had a positive relationship with teacher ratings for the students ( $F [2, 451] = 26.59, < .001$ ), and the scale demonstrated an internal consistency of .80 in urban schools (Goodenow, 1993).

Students in this study completed the full 19 items, however, teachers completed a modified version of the scale. According to the inclusion literature, one of the chief issues for teachers is a shortage of time (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Teachers are pressed to complete a variety of tasks and often do not have adequate time to finish. Therefore, an effort was made in the collection of data to respect the time constraints that teachers face. For this study, the 19-item Sense of School Membership Scale was abbreviated to five items for the teachers (Appendix A). Items were selected by experts in the field of school research and disability studies for their relevance to student needs and inclusion best practices. The five items that teachers responded to were: 1) This student feels like a real part of this school. 2) Most teachers at this school are interested in this student. 3) This student is included in lots of activities at this school. 4) This student is treated with as much respect as other students. 5) This student has good friends here at school. Teachers responded to the statements on a 5–point scale from ‘1’ =

Not True at All, to '5' = Completely True. In this study the student scale was reduced to the same 5 items used in the abbreviated teacher scale. Reducing the student scale down to 5 items did not significantly change students' mean scores on the scale. There was a very high correlation between student responses on the full and abbreviated scale ( $r = .903, p < .001$ ). Consistency was maintained in the quantitative comparison of student and teacher perspectives on school belonging by using abbreviated scales for both groups.

### **Social Support and Relationships**

In addition to the quantitative data on school belonging, data were also collected on the student and teacher perceptions of the type and frequency of social interactions that the students have with peers and school staff. Students completed a 15-item scale on social interactions called the School Stressors and Resources Subscale created by Moos and Moos (1995; Appendix D). Again, in order to respect the time constraints of teachers, an abbreviated scale was created using just 8 items (Appendix A). These items were selected by experts in the field of disability and schools for their relevance to school inclusion and the needs of students with disabilities in transition. As with the school belonging scale, only those 8 items out of the 15 that students completed which match those completed by teachers are analyzed, in order to maintain consistency. Student responses to the abbreviated stressors and resources scale was found to have a significant, positive relationship with the full scale ( $r = .410, p < .001$ ). The eight items were answered on a five-point unnumbered likert-type scale ("never" to "often"). The first six items examined stressful or unsupportive interactions with peers and

adults, and are: 1) Does this student have arguments or fights with any students at school? 2) Does this student have arguments or fights with any teachers, coaches, or counselors? 3) Do students at school make fun of, criticize, or disapprove of this student? 4) Are any teachers, coaches or counselors critical or disapproving of this student? 5) Is there too much pressure to compete with other students at school? 6) Do any teachers, coaches, or counselors expect too much of this student or give her/him too much homework? The last two items examined supportive interactions with adults at the school: 7) Does this student have fun, laugh, or joke with any of the teachers, coaches, or counselors? 8) Do any of the teachers, coaches or counselors really understand how this student feels about things? The scale items were not strongly related to one another, as evidenced by a fair to moderate Cronbach's alpha on both the teacher school stressors subscale (.63) and school resources subscale (.74). The student stressors subscale alpha was poor (.52) while the resources subscale (.63) was somewhat higher. The low alphas for these subscales is not surprising given that the scale items, while each related to stressors or supports, are not expected to have a significant relationship. While being made fun of (item 3) and receiving too much homework (item 6) are both stressful, experiencing one is unlikely to increase the probability of experiencing the other.

Table 1. Summary of Measures

	Qualitative	Quantitative
<b>Teacher</b>	Four open-ended questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What issues have come up for this student during the transition from [school name deleted] to the current school?</li> <li>2. How have these issues been addressed?</li> <li>3. What is the current status of these issues?</li> <li>4. What positive things have you noticed regarding this student during the transition from [school name deleted]?</li> </ol>	Length of time knowing the student  Frequency of contact with the student  Abbreviated Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993)  Abbreviated School Stressors and Resources Scale (Moos & Moos, 1995)
<b>Student</b>	Three open-ended questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Please describe the 2 best things about your move from [school name deleted] to your new school.</li> <li>2. Please describe the 2 worst things about your move from [school name deleted] to your new school.</li> <li>3. What things would you like to have changed at your new school?</li> </ol>	Complete Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993)  Complete School Stressors and Resources Scale (Moos & Moos, 1995)  Self-Efficacy for New Experiences Subscale (Cowen et al., 1991)

### Procedure

Following university IRB and school district approval for data collection, permission forms in both Spanish and English were mailed by school staff to parents. Permission forms were also given to students to take home, with instructions to give the forms to their parents. Information about the research was given to parents through the forms as well as in meetings with parents organized by the school district. Parents were given the opportunity to decline consent. Student surveys, which included the open-ended qualitative questions and quantitative scales, were administered to the students in the schools by “citywide”

teachers. Citywide teachers are teachers who work for the district's office of disability services and specialize in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. They typically work in multiple schools rather than one (hence the title "citywide"), and offer both direct service to students and consultation to school staff on how to include students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Because the citywide teachers were not the students' classroom teacher, the potential confound of demand characteristics was reduced. In addition, by having only those who worked in the schools and were district employees administer surveys, student confidentiality was preserved. Citywide teachers completed online human subjects training in addition to training in student survey administration procedures from the university research team. Once certified in human subjects training, they completed an active student assent process and administered surveys to the students during school hours. The student survey data (both qualitative and quantitative) were completely deidentified before being given to university researchers in order to maintain student confidentiality.

In addition to the student data that was collected, 110 school-based teachers and staff who worked with surveyed students completed the Teacher Survey on Individual Students. The teachers who completed surveys were selected by citywide teachers who worked in the student's school based on the teacher's knowledge of the student (in terms of length of time knowing the student and frequency of interactions with the student) and availability. Teachers were given the surveys by citywide teachers and in order to respect their limited

time, they were asked to complete them on their own. Teachers then returned the surveys to the citywide teachers or mailed them to the researchers at DePaul University. The Teacher Survey on Individual Students included the four open-ended qualitative questions as well as the two abbreviated quantitative scales. In some instances, teachers completed surveys on multiple students, hence the smaller number of teachers (110) than students (163).

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Preliminary Analysis**

The qualitative data was analyzed using a grounded-theory approach, which is considered one of the most rigorous methods in qualitative research and is particularly suited to uncovering the meanings that people assign to their experiences (Morrow & Smith, 1998). A theory is considered grounded when it is developed inductively from a corpus of data rather than deductively from a grand theory. In this case, the qualitative data was used to search for the problems and actions taken to address problems that emerged after a transition to school inclusion. While there is some information on the problems teachers and students face during a transition to inclusion, there is no coherent theory that describes what obstacles come up and how to address them, therefore an inductive approach is warranted. A grounded approach is also a sensible and useful method because it allows an explanation of the issues of the transition to emerge from the participants' data rather than a predetermined theory. Given that this study examines transition problems from student and teacher perspectives, a grounded approach will allow relevant themes to emerge from each perspective

independently and will therefore avoid favoring one perspective over the other. By avoiding theoretical bias by researchers during the first stages of analysis, findings of correspondence and divergence in later phases will be more likely to reflect true agreements and disagreements in perspective between participants (Tebbs, 2005).

A grounded theory analysis proceeds in a series of steps. First, in the preliminary analysis the responses to the open-ended questions on the student and teacher surveys are labeled using micro-codes (words or phrases that convey the meaning of small units of text) and listed in an initial codebook, a process referred to as *open-coding*. The codes are combined, edited and clarified, and relationships among codes are represented in the creation of coding categories, a process referred to as *axial coding*. The developed codebook becomes the data analysis tool, and once the first draft is created, the investigators use it to proceed with the analysis.

The preliminary analysis of the quantitative data starts with a check for missing data, reliability, and a check of the frequency and distribution of the school belonging scale. Each scale is then checked for demographic differences, by ethnicity, gender, and disability type. This checking is done to ensure that if unusual or unexpected results emerge in the data that are the result of demographic differences between scales, they will be detected and accounted for.

### **Data reduction**

In the data reduction phase the bulk of the collected data is winnowed down to only the salient qualitative themes and the significant statistical

relationships. The purpose of the data reduction is to select only the most fruitful trends in the data for further investigation. The qualitative data is reduced through a process of repeated editing and clarification of codes. A grounded theory approach requires two independent observers to develop a codebook together and to verify agreement in the use of codes with a kappa statistic (Cohen, 1960). In this step of the analysis, the researchers code the same randomly selected 10% of the data independently using only the codes in the codebook, and then meet to compare how many times they used the same codes to how many times they used different codes, or omitted codes used by the other coder. The percentage of agreement to overall number of codes is the kappa statistic (Cohen, 1960). Whenever there is a disagreement, the investigators collaborate to refine the codebook and eliminate or change unclear codes. In this way, the many micro-codes that are originally produced are winnowed down to a selected group of codes that are the most clear and reliable. The coders repeat the process of editing and checking agreement until a kappa of .80 is reached. During this phase of the analysis, the coded data is entered into a qualitative data analysis program (NVIVO), which will assist in finding relationships among themes in the data and creating a model of the findings, a process referred to as *selective coding*.

In the quantitative aspect of the study, data reduction is achieved by examining the quantitative data for statistically significant relationships. In particular, the relationships between the stressors and resources scale and the school belonging scale will be tested, and relationships between student and teacher scales will be examined. In this way the quantitative results are “reduced”



by finding those relationships that are significant. In addition, graphical representations of the quantitative results are created to facilitate comparison.

### **Transformation**

The data transformation aspect of the study occurs by calculating the frequencies of qualitative codes with qualitative software (NVIVO 2). Qualitative codes and themes can then be analyzed for quantitative trends. For example, the frequency with which two codes are used can be analyzed and compared within and between students and teachers. Additionally, the frequency of codes that occur together (with the same student) can be analyzed in order to look for trends in co-occurrences.

### **Data Comparison**

Both the transformed and pre-transformed data are used to compare qualitative and quantitative results, and compare student and teacher responses. The comparison is done by investigating significant findings in the quantitative data that correspond to or contradict salient themes in the qualitative data. For example, if a significant relationship is found between school belonging and social support, then qualitative results (transformed and pre-transformed) that speak to sense of belonging and social support are compared. The goal of this stage is to find whether or not data types do in fact converge or “triangulate” or whether there are significant differences in the data. A benefit of this comparison is that the quantitative findings can be understood with greater depth using the qualitative information that students and teachers provide. For example, a relationship may be found between teacher reports of social stress and student

reports of low school belonging. By viewing how these are described, we may gain a better understanding of barriers to school belonging and brief explanations of findings will be presented in this section and elsewhere in the results section when appropriate.

### **Integration**

In the final stage of the analysis, the findings of the comparison are reported in a manner that integrates the overall results, rather than just those produced by qualitative or quantitative analysis alone. In the integration stage the results in the previous steps of the analysis are used to address the six guiding questions of the overall study. For example, the first question (*What problems and opportunities do teachers encounter when attempting to include students with disabilities in their classroom?*) is addressed using qualitative and quantitative teacher data from the teacher survey on problems and positives in the classrooms and with specific students. The second research question (*What problems and opportunities do students with disabilities encounter when being included in general education classrooms?*) is addressed with qualitative and quantitative data collected from students regarding the problems they have encountered and the benefits of the transition. By answering the guiding questions with both qualitative and quantitative results, findings can be verified, inconsistencies can be interpreted, new meanings can be discovered and the process of inclusion following the transition can be better understood.

## **CHAPTER III: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Preliminary Analysis: Quantitative**

All of the measures were first examined for missing data. Upon examination it was found that some respondents had left items unanswered on each of the scales. This missing data presented a problem for two reasons. First, taking out scales that had unanswered items would substantially decrease statistical power, and second, because the scales had been abbreviated, they were particularly sensitive to some standard approaches when managing missing data, such as listwise deletion, which would remove all data if a certain percentage of the items were missing. Therefore, a pairwise deletion procedure was used to manage missing data in all of the scales.

After examining measures for missing data, scales were examined for internal reliability. It was found that reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was adequate for the Sense of School Membership Scale, student version = .75, and good for the Sense of School Membership Scale, teacher version = .84. Cronbach's alpha on the teacher school stressors (.63) and resources (.74) subscales were adequate, while the student stressors (.52) and resources (.63) subscales were poor.

Next, demographic variables for each measure were compared in order to check for under or over representation of subgroups within each measure. In the overall sample it was found that the proportion of African-American students was much higher than Latino, White or Asian students, and there were more male than female students. Between measures it was found that measures had comparable numbers of respondents by gender, race and disability (Table 2).

Table 2: Demographics by measure

	School Belonging	School Stressors and Resources
African American	87	86
Latino	21	21
Asian	1	1
White	2	1
Female	49	48
Male	62	61
No Disability	19	19
Mild Disability	11	11
Moderate Disability	64	62
Severe Disability	16	16

### **Preliminary Analysis: Qualitative**

The preliminary phase of the qualitative data analysis proceeded in two steps. First, in the open coding step of the analysis, responses to the open-ended questions on the teacher and student surveys were labeled using micro-codes (words or phrases that convey the meaning of a small amount of text) and listed in an initial codebook. This process yielded 264 preliminary codes for the teacher data and 260 preliminary codes for the student data. The second step then proceeded, in which axial coding was performed. In axial coding, the preliminary open codes were combined, edited and clarified. Investigators grouped codes into

coding categories that adequately represented the relationships or shared themes among codes. The result was the creation of two initial codebooks that could then be used as the data analysis tools in the next steps of the analysis. For the teacher data the result was 168 codes grouped into 28 categories and for the student data a preliminary codebook was developed with 94 codes grouped into 18 categories.

### **Phase 1, Data Reduction: Quantitative**

The means and standard deviations for the abbreviated measures were examined and compared to norm group means and standard deviations where appropriate.

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations

	School Belonging Scale	Stressors and Resources Scale
Student N	115	113
Student Mean	3.70	1.90
Student SD	1.02	0.53
Teacher N	152	152
Teacher Mean	3.84	1.67
Teacher SD	0.80	0.48

The school belonging mean was substantially higher for the sample in this study as compared to the norm sample. Goodenow (1993) normed the scale on two student samples from urban schools and the overall scale means were 3.11 (SD=.70) and 3.09 (SD=.61). The school belonging means for students (3.70) and teachers (3.84) correspond to clearly above “somewhat true” or 3 and approaching “true” or 4 on the 5-point scale from “not at all true” to “completely

true.” This finding suggests that students and teachers felt that as students adjusted to their new schools during this first year, they felt they belonged there.

### Tests of Significance

The next step in quantitative data reduction was to examine that data for significant relationships. Significance tests were also done to investigate whether there were notable similarities and differences between student and teacher responses. Pearson correlations were estimated to establish relationships between student and teacher responses for each of the measures. Means and standard deviations in Table 3 differ from those in Table 4 because the sample size is reduced to only those students and teachers who had corresponding complete data to compare. Results show that teacher and student ratings were significantly positively correlated for school belonging and social resources, but not for social stressors (Table 4).

Table 4: Student and teacher correlations and paired sample t-tests by measure

	Student M (SD)	Teacher M (SD)	N	<i>Student- Teacher Correlation</i>	<i>p</i>	df	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig. (2 tailed)</i>
School Belonging	3.75 (.99)	3.87 (.72)	111	.26**	.01	110	-1.19	.24
Social Stressors	1.61 (.51)	1.52 (.46)	109	.05	.62	108	1.34	.18
Social Resources	3.29 (1.09)	3.68 (.80)	104	.35**	.01	103	-3.37	<.01

A paired sample t-test was also performed to see if the means of student and teacher responses on scales were significantly different. The results (Table 4) show that only the social resources scale was statistically significant.

The results of both the correlations and t-tests suggest that students and teachers had statistically significant similarities in their perceptions of school belonging. These similarities suggest that for the most part teachers accurately understood the degree of belonging students felt in their new schools.

The results of the correlation also show an interesting difference between students and teachers. While teachers were in agreement with students about whether they felt belonging, teachers were not in agreement with students about the social support or stressful social interactions that students experienced. In order to get a closer look at this finding, and because the scale items were not intended to hang together, the social stressor items were examined individually for correlation between teachers and students (Table 5).

Table 5: School stressors subscale responses by item

	Student M (SD)	Teacher M (SD)	N	<i>Student- Teacher Correlation</i>	<i>P</i>
Does this student have arguments or fights with any students at school?	1.47 (.87)	1.47 (.69)	89	.12	.25
Does this student have argument or fights with any teachers, coaches, or counselors	1.23 (.56)	1.40 (.75)	85	.08	.49

Do students at school make fun of, criticize, or disapprove of this student?	1.78 (1.00)	1.50 (.67)	86	.17	.11
Are any teachers, coaches or counselors critical or disapproving of this student?	1.25 (.66)	1.27 (.53)	81	-.16	.15
Is there too much pressure to compete with other students at school?	1.84 (1.16)	1.59 (.87)	85	.05	.65
Do any teachers, coaches, or counselors expect too much of this student or give her/him too much homework?	2.10 (1.18)	1.43 (.66)	79	.04	.74

As can be seen in Table 5, students and teachers perceptions of school stressors did not correlate for any of the subscale items. These results suggest that if one knew the teacher's response to the social stressors scale, or on any given item on the scale, one could not predict the response of the student that teacher was referencing. These findings indicate that students and teachers perceived school stressors for individual students differently. However, the overall levels of stress reported for each stressor were generally comparable.

Although the results of the correlations suggest that students and teachers viewed social support similarly, the results of the t-tests show significant differences in how the two groups responded. There are two items on the school resources scale, and to get a better idea of which items led to agreement and which to disagreement, further analysis was done by item (Table 6). The results



suggested that students and teachers significantly agreed on whether students are having fun at their school but did not agree about whether teachers and other staff really understand how the students feel. Students answered that this understanding sometimes happens, while teachers indicated that it happens often.

Table 6: Student and Teacher Social Resources by Item

	Student M (SD)	Teacher M (SD)	<i>Student- Teacher Correlation</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>T(df)</i>	<i>p</i>
Do you/this student have fun at this school?	3.55 (1.27)	3.77 (.88)	.22*	.03	-1.64 (103)	.11
Do any teachers/ counselors/ coaches really understand how you/this student feels?	3.05 (1.33)	3.63 (.96)	-.17	.10	-3.49 (96)	<=.00

\*< = .05, \*\*< = .01

Given that a by-item analysis was performed for the school stressors and resources subscales, correlations and paired-sample t-tests were performed for each item on the school belonging measure as well. When the school belonging measure was examined by item, variation was found in the relationship between teacher and student answers (Table 7). Teachers were able to accurately gauge students' feelings of belonging on three of the five questions.

Table 7: Student and Teacher School Belonging by Item

	Student M	Teacher M	<i>Student-Teacher Correlation</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>T(df)</i>	<i>p</i>
I/This student feel/s like a real part of this school	3.81	3.82	.21*	.03	.74 (105)	.46
Most teachers at my/this school are interested in me/this student	3.89	3.96	.04	.70	-.97 (103)	.33
I'm/this student is included in lots of activities at my/this school	2.80	3.17	.27**	.01	-1.64 (96)	.10
I/this student am/is treated with as much respect as other students	3.83	4.37	.08	.40	-3.25** (104)	<=.00
I/This student has good friends at school	4.08	3.74	.31**	.01	2.68** (100)	.01

\*< = .05, \*\*< = .01

Correlational findings show that teachers' answers to the item "This student feels like a real part of this school" had a small but positive relationship with students' answers to the item "I feel like a real part of this school." Teachers' answers also had a small but positive relationship with student answers to an item

on whether the student is included in activities at the school. Teachers' answers correlated modestly but significantly positively with student answers concerning whether the student had made friends at their new school. In terms of differences, the paired-sample t-tests were conducted such that student means were entered into the t-test first, meaning that teacher means were subtracted from student means. The resulting difference was then tested for significance. Two items were found to be significantly different. The first item examined whether students were treated with as much respect as other students. Student answers were slightly higher than "somewhat true" while teacher answers were closer to "completely true." The second item asked whether students had good friends at the school. Students rated the item as "completely true" while teachers rated it lower, between "completely" and "somewhat" true.

The results of the quantitative data reduction show that the school belonging scale was an area of agreement between students and teachers. The social stressors and resources subscales were areas where at times students and teachers did not agree. Overall, these mixed findings appear to show that while teachers were able to detect whether students felt they did or did not belong in their new schools, they were less able to detect whether the students experienced social difficulties and whether they felt understood.

### **Phase 1, Data reduction: Qualitative**

In the data reduction phase the qualitative data was reduced through a process of *selective coding*. In selective coding reduction occurred through

repeated editing and clarification of codes using a kappa statistic. In this step of the analysis, investigators randomly selected 10% of the data and each investigator coded the selected data independently, using the codebook developed in the preliminary analysis. The investigators then met to compare how they coded the data. Before data can be compared, a unit of analysis must be agreed to. In the case of both the student and teacher data, respondents wrote down an answer to an open-ended question. The vast majority of the answers were single-sentence responses, therefore, it seemed most parsimonious to select each response as a single unit of analysis.

When calculating kappa, investigators counted how many times they used the same codes for the same units of analysis. The investigators then divided the number of codes used the same way by the total number of codes. The resulting percentage of agreement is the kappa statistic. For example, if 10 codes were used and the investigators used 5 of the codes the same way on the same units of analysis, then  $5/10 = .50$ , and kappa is 50%. When both coders find that no code fits a unit of analysis that is counted as an instance of agreement. Whenever there is a disagreement, the investigators would then stop, collaborate, and refine the codebook to eliminate or change codes that produced the disagreement. In the example given above, the investigators would discuss each of the 5 codes that they used differently, and clarify or cut the code from the codebook. In this way, the micro-codes that were produced in the preliminary analysis were reduced, and the resulting codebook contained only the most clear and reliable codes. Investigators repeated this process of editing and checking with both the student

and teacher data until a kappa of .80 or greater was reached. When .80 was achieved for each set of data, investigators then stopped editing and clarifying codes, and the codebook was considered to be final.

By creating a large number of micro-codes and then reducing them down to the most clear and reliable codes, the process yielded coded data that were exhaustive while also being mutually exclusive. For the student data the process yielded 80 codes and 18 categorical groupings (Appendix F), and for the teacher data the final codebook contained 76 codes and 13 categorical groupings (Appendix G). Once a codebook was finalized for each data set, the data was coded one final time by each investigator and 10% of the data was selected at random and checked for agreement. The final Kappa for the student data was .83, and the for the teacher data final Kappa was .87.

The final coded data was examined further to see if there were any larger over-arching themes into which the categorical groupings could be developed. In particular, themes that cut across both student and teacher data were of special interest, because these themes could signal an important element of the inclusion process following a transition. The result of this effort was the development of five cross-cutting themes: Academics, Social Issues, Accessibility, School Climate and School System/Community Issues. Within most, but not all, of these themes were codes describing problems and negative experiences, as well as codes about problem-solving and positive experiences. Therefore, some of the cross-cutting themes were divided into two types: positive and negative. These themes represent teachers' responses to the questions 1) What issues have come

up for this student during the transition from [school name deleted] to the current school? 2) How have these issues been addressed? 3) What is the current status on these issues? 4) What positive things have you noticed regarding this student during the transition from [school name deleted]? Students responded to the prompts: 1) Please describe the 2 best things about your move from [school name deleted] to your new school. 2) Please describe the 2 worst things about your move from [school name deleted] to your new school. 3) What things would you like to have changed at your new school?

The themes and the categorical groupings that constitute them are detailed in Table 8, along with examples that illustrate both positive and negative statements on the themes.

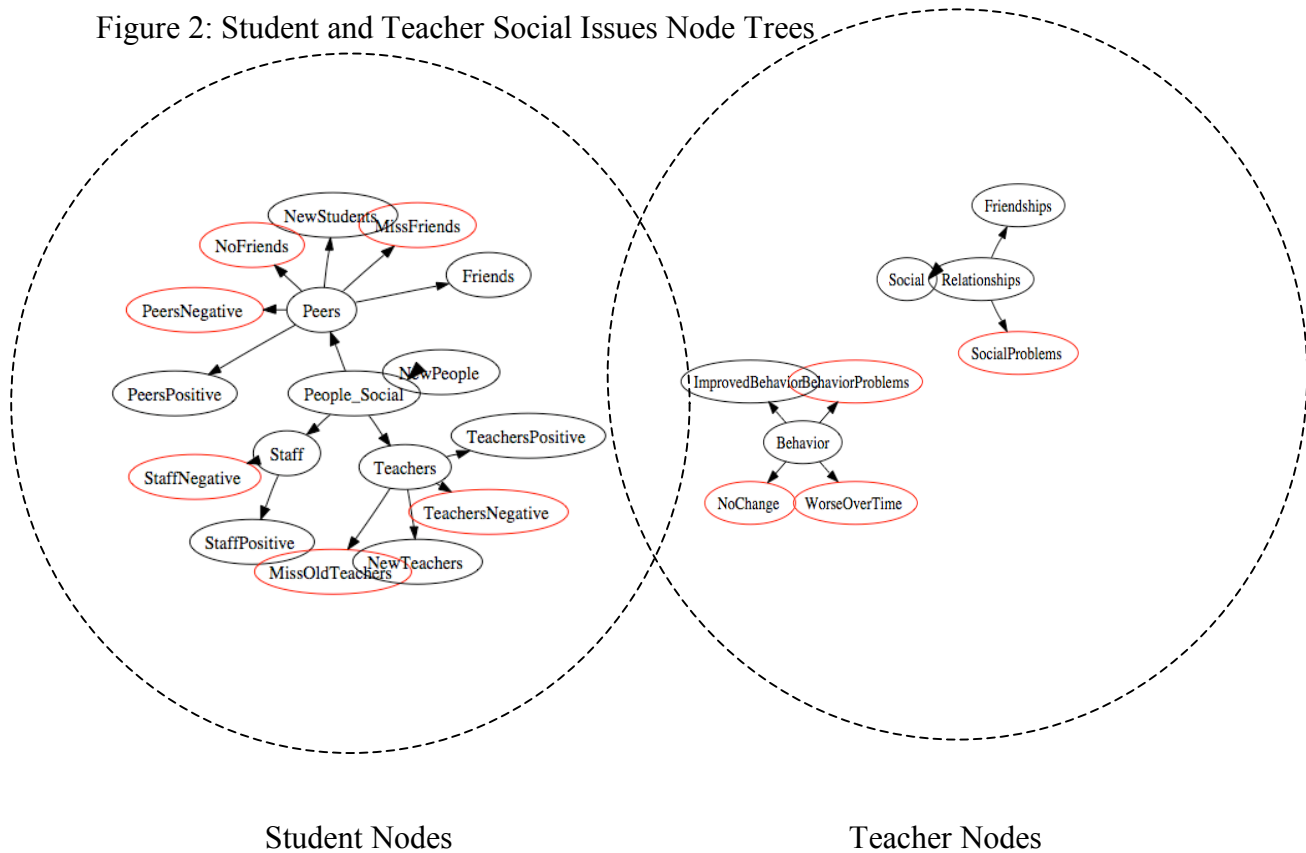
Table 8: Cross-Cutting Qualitative Themes

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Student Categorical Groupings</i>	<i>Teacher Categorical Groupings</i>
Academics	<i>Academics</i> “I had the opportunity to try a new class” “I have my first ‘F’”	<i>Academics</i> “He has shown improvement in his homework” “[the student has a] problem completing work in a timely manner”  <i>Participation</i> “She actively participates in class” “Student does not participate in class”
Social Issues	<i>People/Social</i> “My friends listen to me more at this school” “I don’t really know anyone here”	<i>Relationships</i> “He seems to have lots of friends” “Has problems with relationships”  <i>Behavior</i> “He doesn’t have any behavior problems” “His classroom behavior is also inappropriate”

Accessibility	<p><i>Accessibility</i>            “I would like wheel chair ramps”            “Would make classes more accessible”</p> <p><i>New School Physical Space</i>            “More space in the classrooms and hallways”            “Bigger school”</p>	<p><i>Mobility/Accessibility</i>            “...elevators have been fixed”            “due to elevator out of service for 4 weeks, he hasn’t been in my class”</p> <p><i>Medical/Health</i>            “has been unable to attend [SCHOOL NAME] due to her medical conditions.”            “transition issues that are of concern are... her frequent seizures at school”</p> <p><i>Aide</i>            “Student has an aide to assist him”            “She needs an aide for classroom work”</p>
School Climate	<p><i>New School Climate</i>            “the new school feels like home”            “I do not feel comfortable at this school”</p> <p><i>Freedom</i>            “More freedom [at new school]”            “I hate it when they don’t let you do the things you want”</p> <p><i>Discipline</i>            “I get into more trouble...”            I don’t like when one person gets into trouble and everyone gets punished for it”</p>	<p><i>School Adjustment</i>            “She feels at one with all her fellow students and staff”            “because the transition happened so fast, the receiving school had no time to plan introduction to socials to get to know one another.”</p>
School System/Community Issues	<p><i>Safety</i>            “I am safe”            “Kids fighting almost every day”</p> <p><i>Scheduling/Commuting</i>            “I get to take the CTA bus back and forward to school”            “I need a bus for after school program”</p>	<p><i>School Response</i>            “...we had a training opportunity last week”            “CPS needs to assist us...”</p> <p><i>Transportation Issues</i>            “worked with bus company and school nurse...”            “He would like to have bus service so he can stay for after school activities”</p>

To get a clearer idea of how the codes fit together into groupings that then fit into overall cross-cutting themes, a set of node trees representing the groups of codes that make up the cross-cutting theme of “Social Issues” is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Student and Teacher Social Issues Node Trees



A node tree illustrates the relationships among codes in a radial fashion.

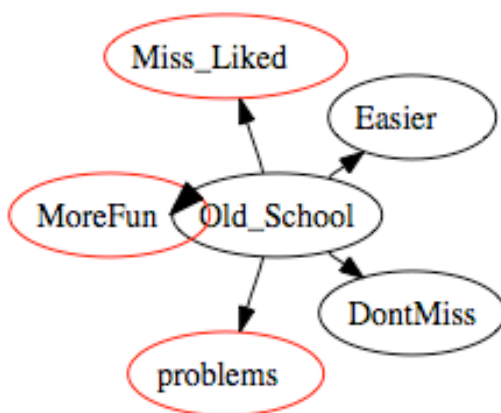
The code tree in Figure 2 shows the codes that, all together, make up the grouping of “People/Social” in the student data, and the groupings “Behavior” and “Relationships” in the teacher data. The ovals in red signify negative experiences, while the ovals in black signify positive or neutral experiences. As can be seen from the code trees, students had much more to say about the varieties of relationships they gained and lost, while teachers focused more on the role of



student behavior in social issues. This glance at the code trees that make up the cross-cutting themes illustrates that while a theme may cut across both student and teacher reports, the content and character of the theme may differ significantly.

Of course, not every categorical grouping was a fit for the cross-cutting themes. For example, students sometimes described the school that they transitioned from, and this topic rarely appeared in the teacher reports (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Node tree of student descriptions of their old school



In cases such as these, the grouping was not added to a cross-cutting theme but rather the individual codes within categories were examined to see if they were a fit in any of the themes. In some cases individual codes did fit into a theme, but in others codes could not fit into the overall framework. When this lack of fit is the case, these coded data are examined independently of the themes and integrated into results as appropriate.

The results of the qualitative data reduction show that there are cross-cutting themes in the student and teacher responses. Students and teachers, while reporting on the themes differently, each discussed social issues, academics, accessibility, school climate, and school system/community issues. Overall, these findings show that while teachers and students had different experiences in the transition to inclusion, there were issues and concerns that resonated with both groups and emerge in their reports.

### **Phase 2: Transformation**

In order to get a fuller picture of the qualitative data, the coded responses were transformed to quantitative data by calculating the frequency of the codes. Frequency counts were taken using NVIVO 2 and are presented in figures 4 and 5. The codes were grouped into the five themes developed in the data reduction phase of the analysis.

Figure 4: Frequency of Student-Reported Qualitative Themes

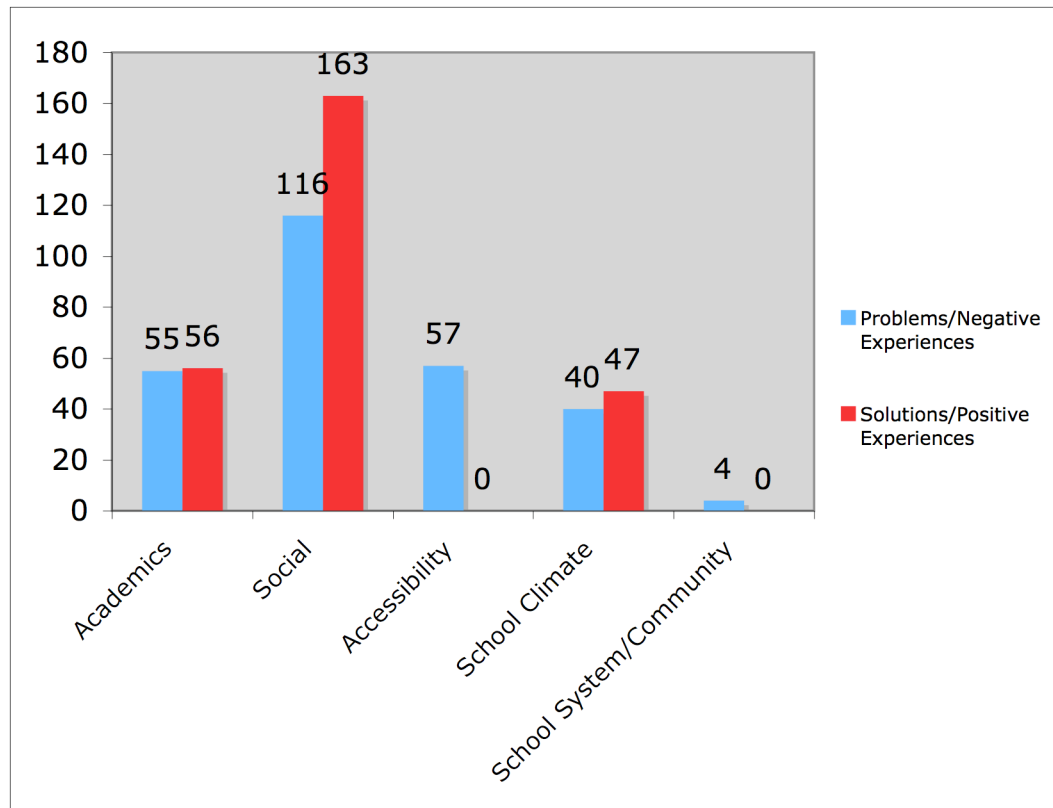
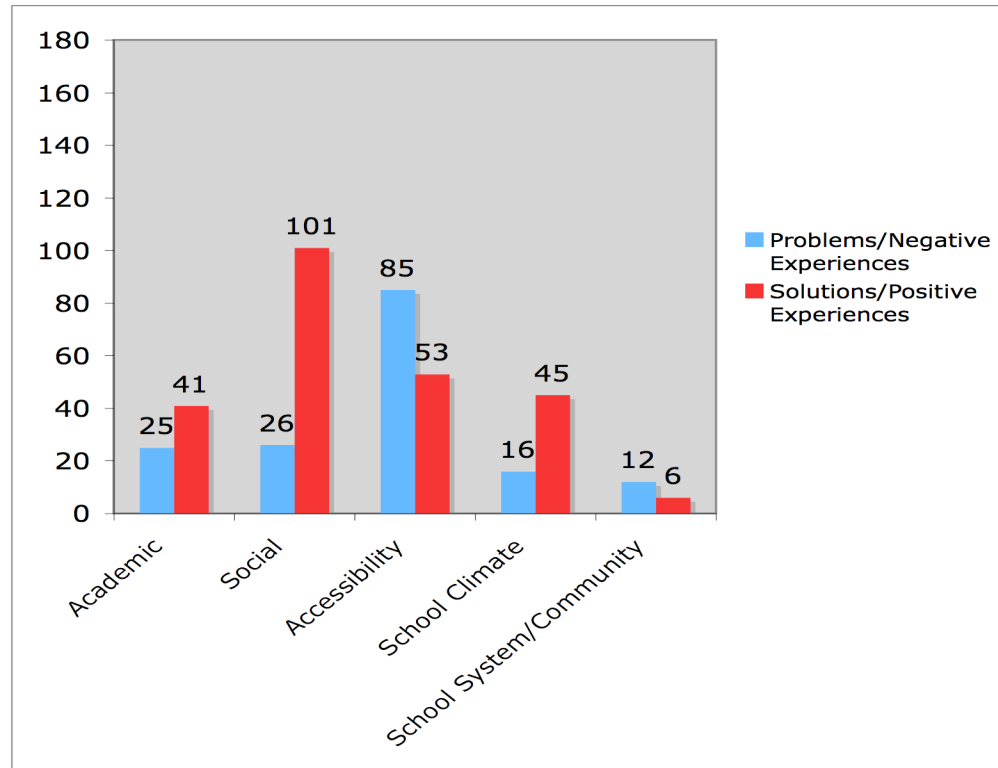


Figure 5: Frequency of Teacher-Reported Qualitative Themes



The frequency counts of the qualitative themes show a pattern in which most of the focus is placed on social issues for both students and teachers. Additionally, both groups reported far more positive social experiences rather than social problems. Another trend in the frequency counts shows that when students or teachers discussed accessibility, both groups described problems more often than problem-solving or positive experiences.

In addition to the frequency counts, the qualitative data was transformed by entering the presence of a code into the student and teacher's quantitative data. This transformation was done by creating a variable for each possible code in the

SPSS database, and entering a '1' if the code is present or a '0' if the code was not present. By indicating the presence or absence of codes in the quantitative database, means could then be calculated for each cross-cutting theme and then compared to the quantitative scales. This mixed method procedure was used to facilitate the data comparison phase of the analysis.

### **Phase 3, Data Comparison**

The goal of the comparison phase of the analysis is to examine the qualitative and quantitative data side by side and discover if there are significant similarities or differences between data types. Comparing qualitative and quantitative data can show relationships between the data types, and a deeper understanding of the transition to inclusion may be possible. Two analyses compared the qualitative and quantitative data. The first analysis used the transformed qualitative data entered into the SPSS database to test for significant relationships between the transformed qualitative data and the quantitative scales. This analysis provides a broad overview of what relationships exist between the data types. The second analysis examined the data in more depth by examining each quantitative item and searching for qualitative data that corresponds to the item. In particular, the student/teacher correlations are known for each item, and the qualitative data was examined to see if it could shed light on the substance of student/teacher agreement and disagreement. In this way, information could be gathered to compare the data types, and also to provide a basis for comparing teacher and student data.

### **Analysis One: Comparison of transformed qualitative data to quantitative scales**

To compare the transformed qualitative data to each quantitative scale, the means of student positive and negative qualitatively reported experiences were first calculated. To clarify, the transformation was done by creating variables in the SPSS database for each qualitative code and then entering a “1” if the student’s qualitative data contained that code, and a “0” if it did not. Each of the cross-cutting themes was then entered into the database as positive and negative types (e.g. “Student Positive Academic Experiences” vs “Student Academic Problems”) these variables represented basic positive and negative experiences within a particular theme. Next, the values for each cross-cutting theme were calculated by summing the number of those codes that were part of the theme by positive and negative types. All the cross-cutting positive experiences were then summed into a variable called “Student Positive Experiences Combined” and the same was done for negative experiences. The frequencies of the combined positive and negative experiences were then used in the data comparison analysis to the quantitative scales.

The analysis was done by overall positive and negative experiences rather by each qualitative theme (viz., Academics, Social Issues, Accessibility etc.). The sample sizes for each theme, once divided into positive and negative, were too small to use for tests of significance. The transformed qualitative data, in the form of the means for student positive experiences combined and the means for negative experiences combined, were correlated with the scale means and with

demographic data. Finally, those relationships that were found to be significant were further analyzed in hierarchical linear regressions, so that demographic variables found to be significant could be controlled for in the final analysis.

These HLMs allowed for an analysis that showed whether qualitatively reported negative or positive experiences helped explain variance in quantitative scales above and beyond demographic variables.

### *Correlations*

Correlations were performed for each quantitative scale. The correlations show that there were several significant relationships between the scales and the transformed qualitative data.

Table 9: Correlations for school belonging, school stressors, resources and demographics

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Student School Belonging	1 115	.26** .01 111	-.24** .01 113	.10 .29 111	.28** >.01 111	.16 .10 108	.12 .24 97	-.27** .01 93	.25* .02 83	-.15 .23 65
2. Teacher School Belonging		1 152	.03 .80 109	-.28** >.01 150	.19 <.05 107	.50** >.01 149	.03 .81 96	-.14 .20 90	-.004 .97 109	-.34** >.01 77
3. Student School Stressors			1 113	-.10 .31 106	-.22* .02 111	-.10 .31 106	.04 .71 95	.40** >.01 91	-.05 .64 81	.06 .62 63
4. Teacher School Stressors				1 151	.05 .61 107	-.19* .02 148	.07 .49 95	.13 .22 89	.12 .22 109	.08 .51 77
5. Student School Resources					1 111	.25* .01 104	.11 .30 93	-.19 .08 90	.07 .54 79	.40** >.01 91
6. Teacher School Resources						1 149	-.19 .07 77	-.08 .44 88	.01 .93 109	-.27** .02 77

7. Student	1	-.04	-.07	-.25
Positive	.	.72	.59	.07
Experiences	97	80	69	54
Combined				
8. Student		1	-.004	-.04
Negative		.	.98	.72
Experiences		93	109	54
Combined				
9. Teacher			1	.26*
Positive			.	.04
Experiences			110	64
Combined				
10. Teacher				1
Negative				.
Experiences				81
Combined				

\*=> .05, \*\* => .01

As can be seen from table 10, there were several instances in which the quantitative scales were related to the transformed qualitative data. In particular, the student school belonging scale was negatively related to student reports of negative experiences and positively related to teacher reports of student positive experiences. The teacher school belonging scale was negatively related to teacher reports of student negative experiences. The student school stressors scale was positively related to student reports of negative experiences, and the teacher school stressors scale was not related to any of the transformed qualitative data. The student school resources scale was negatively related to teacher reports of student negative experiences. The teacher resources scale was also positively related to teacher reports of student negative experiences. In some instances demographic data was also related to the scales, and therefore in the regression analyses those demographics that had a significant relationship were entered first in order to control for them.



The first regressions were performed for student school belonging (Tables 10 and 11), and tested whether the relationships with student reports of negative experiences and teacher reports of positive experiences were significant even when controlling for disability type and ethnicity.

Table 10: Regressions for student school belonging and student negative experiences

	Beta	t	Sig
Ethnicity	.06	.55	.59
Disability Type	-.01	-.07	.94
Student Negative Experiences Combined	-.28	-2.62	.01**

Table 11: Regressions predicting student school belonging with teacher negative experiences

	Beta	t	Sig
Ethnicity	.19	1.46	.15
Disability Type	-.04	-.29	.78
Teacher Negative Experiences Combined	-.28	-2.20	.03*

Table 12: Regressions predicting teacher school belonging with teacher positive experiences

	Beta	t	Sig
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Ethnicity	.14	1.29	.20
Disability Type	.10	.95	.38
Teacher Positive Experiences Combined	.22	2.05	.04*

The results of the school belonging regression analyses show that student school belonging is negatively predicted by student qualitative reports of negative experiences. The analysis also demonstrates that student belonging is negatively predicted by negative qualitative experiences above and beyond ethnicity and disability type, which were correlated with school belonging. The results also show that teachers' qualitative reports of student positive experiences predict student school belonging above and beyond ethnicity and disability type. Teachers' qualitative reports of student negative experiences was also found to negatively predict teachers' quantitative ratings of student school belonging above and beyond demographic variables.

The next set of regressions tested the relationship between student school stressors and student reports of negative experiences (Table 12). Given that none of the demographic variables were correlated to student school stressors, they were not controlled for in the analysis.

Table 13: Regressions for predicting student school stressors with student negative experiences

	Beta	t	Sig
Student Negative Experiences Combined	.40	4.10	>.01**

The results of the regression for student school stressors demonstrate that the quantitative scale is significantly predicted by students' qualitative reports of negative experiences.

The last set of regressions test the relationships between student school resources and teacher reports of negative experiences (Table 14) and teacher school resources and teacher reports of negative experiences (Table 15).

Table 14: Regressions predicting student school resources with teacher negative experiences

	Beta	t	Sig
Disability Type	.04	.30	.76
Teacher Negative Experiences Combined	-.33	-2.59	.01**

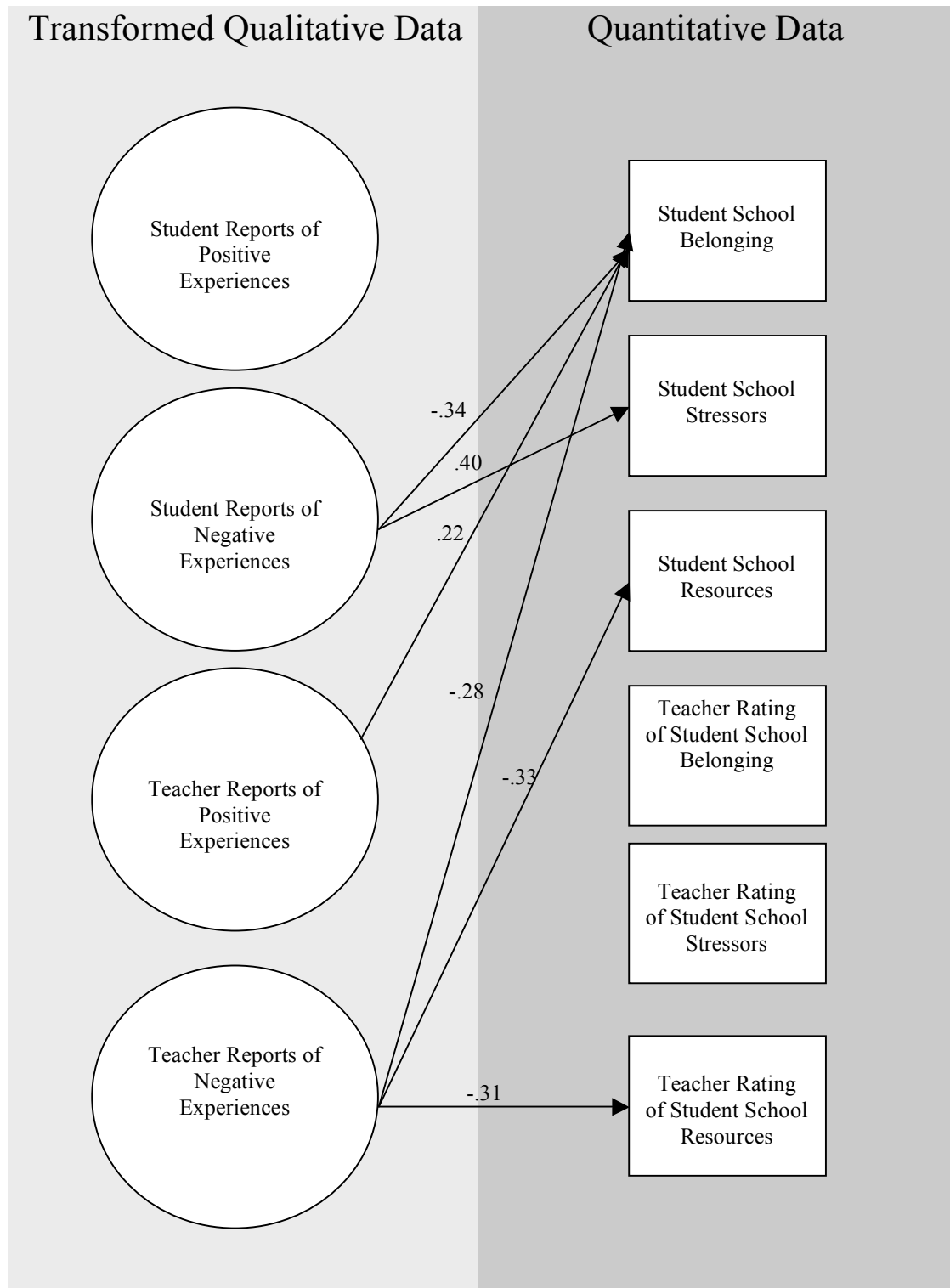
Table 15: Regressions predicting teacher school resources with teacher negative experiences

	Beta	t	Sig
Disability Type	.26	2.10	.04*
Teacher Negative Experiences Combined	-.31	-2.51	.02*

The results of the final two analyses show that teachers' qualitative reports of negative experiences following the transition significantly predicted students' quantitative ratings of school stressors and teachers ratings of students on the same scale.

Overall, the results of the first analysis show that most of the transformed qualitative data had significant relationships with the quantitative scales. The one exception was student qualitative reports of positive experiences, which did not have a significant relationship with any of the quantitative scales. Additionally, while all of the student quantitative scales had relationships with the qualitative data, only the teachers' ratings of students' school resources were significantly related to the qualitative data. This pattern of findings suggests that while there is a great deal of convergence between the qualitative and quantitative data, there are also ways in which the data types diverge and make unique contributions to the overall understanding of the transition. Below is a figure illustrating the relationships found between the data types, with the Beta weights included to show the relative strength of the relationships (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Convergence and divergence of data types



**Analysis Two: Comparison by item**

Another way to compare the qualitative and quantitative data is to examine each quantitative data point (scale items) and look to see if there are corresponding qualitative data that match the quantitative data point. The presence of qualitative data that speaks to the quantitative data is in itself a significant convergence between the data types, particularly given that the prompts for the qualitative data did not ask about belonging or social relationships. Therefore, finding qualitative data that is relevant to the quantitative items would suggest that the qualitative and quantitative data are converging on similar information about the transition.

It is possible to assess an even deeper level of convergence or divergence by examining whether the information available on the quantitative items fit with trends in the available qualitative data. An important piece of information that is known for each of the quantitative items is whether students and teachers agreed on the items (i.e. whether or not teacher and student responses were significantly correlated). Because the extent of quantitative agreement is known for each item, and both teachers and students provided qualitative data, the degree of qualitative agreement can be examined as well and compared to the quantitative agreement.

In order to compare data types by looking for whether there was qualitative data that fit with individual scale items, matrices were created for each quantitative item and these matrices were filled with qualitative data that fits with the quantitative items (Tables 16 to 22). Further, to test whether there was a

pattern of agreement or disagreement between students and teachers in the qualitative data, the data were divided by students and teachers and are color-coded. Qualitative statements that indicate the presence or affirm the quantitative items are in black, while items that indicate the absence or disconfirm the items are in red. Student and teacher responses can be compared in this way, and then compared to the quantitative relationships (or lack thereof) between teacher and student responses. This analysis technique was originally developed by the researcher, and is based on thematic analysis tables in qualitative research.

The first five matrices (Tables 16 to 21) break down the school belonging measure into five items and show whether there were qualitative responses from either students or teachers that correspond to the item. The first matrix (Table 16) takes a closer look at qualitative responses that have to do with whether the student feels like “a real part” of their school, the first item of the school belonging survey.

Table 16: Qualitative responses related to whether the student “feels like a real part” of their school

	Student Qualitative Reports	Teacher Qualitative Reports
I/This student feel/s like a real part of this school	<i>“I feel happy that I’m in my new school”</i> <i>“the new [school] feels like home”</i> <i>“its just better all over”</i> <i>“I really wouldn’t want anything to change here”</i>	<i>“has grown quite comfortable with my class”</i> <i>“[name deleted] has fit in wonderfully”</i> <i>“she feels one with all of her fellow students and staff”</i>
Student	<i>“everything is just right for this is more of my level”</i>	<i>“he likes to mingle with non-disabled peers”</i>
Teacher	<i>“I feel happy that I’m in my new school”</i> <i>“I really like it here!”</i> <i>“I just like going to school”</i> <i>“[school name deleted] is a college prep school and I like college prep schools”</i>	<i>“fits in well with classmates”</i> <i>“student has integrated socially”</i> <i>“He has managed to maintain a sense of community due to presence of those he knew at his previous school.”</i> <i>“[name deleted] is feeling very comfortable... she tells me how much</i>
Correlation = .206* (p = .03)		

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<p><i>"I think this is the best school for me"</i>  <i>"they got a spot for us in this school"</i></p> <p>“some students were uncomfortable around the other kids because they had a disability”          “I didn’t like coming here”          “I don’t think people here understand the students and their disabilities.”          “in this school [there are] a lot of people that is not like me so they be asking a lot of question.”          “I hate this school”          “I was lost and did not know anyone and I had no friends”          “I don’t care for this school sometimes”          “I don’t like it”          “I do not feel comfortable at this school”          “Accept more kids with disabilities. There are very few kids with disabilities.”</p>	<p><i>she loves her classes”</i></p> <p>“[name deleted] seemed somewhat shy about joining in with the students during the first week”          “student feels as though he is alone”          “probs fitting in socially”          “questions of social adjustment...”          “Student is a loner”</p>
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The quantitative responses to question one of the school belonging survey show a positive correlation between student and teacher responses. The qualitative responses show correspondence on positive items, but also show that teachers reported far fewer negative experiences for the students than the students themselves. Results also reveal that the teachers and students attribute feeling like a part of the school to somewhat different things. The teachers focused on the social aspects of the transition in their responses, explaining that the students “fit in,” “integrated socially” or had “probs fitting in socially.” Students also pointed to social aspects of the transition, but primarily when indicating that they did not feel like a part of their school. They were also more specific in pointing out that not feeling like a part of their school was at times dependent on their status as a student with a disability. For example, one student explained. “some students



were uncomfortable around the other kids because they had a disability” and another pointed out that “there are very few kids with disabilities.” When students felt like a part of their school they did not point to the social aspects of the transition as much to the school climate. For example students explained that their new school “feels like home”, that they are happy in their new school and that the new school has a “spot for us.” Overall, the qualitative results suggest that teachers perceived that students felt like a part of the school when they adapted socially, while students felt that they fit in when the school climate was positive and felt left out when they did not adapt socially.

The next quantitative school belonging item asks whether teachers are interested in the student (Table 17), and as with the previous table it is presented as a color-coded matrix.

Table 17: Qualitative responses related to whether teachers are interested in the student

	Student Qualitative Reports	Teacher Qualitative Reports
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<p>Most teachers at my/this school are interested in me/this student</p> <p>Student Teacher Correlation = .039 (p = .70)</p>	<p><i>"it has better teachers and good classmates"</i></p> <p><i>"New teachers – Ms. [name deleted] is especially nice."</i></p> <p><i>"we learn a little bit more. People here are excited to teach!"</i></p> <p><i>"I like my teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"teachers here are more helpful"</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers here are a whole lot different. They don't try to give you a free ride because you are in a chair. They expect you to do what you are capable of doing."</i></p> <p><i>"the teachers and lunches are nice"</i></p> <p><i>"the teachers are great"</i></p> <p><i>"teachers – they're nice here"</i></p> <p><i>"you get more help from the teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"this school has nice teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"like my new teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"like my teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"it has better teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"it has nice teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"they teach us some things that I didn't know"</i></p> <p><i>"The staff is supportive and caring"</i></p> <p><i>"some teachers need to change their attitude and teach skills"</i></p> <p><i>"we need better security guards and some better teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"Miss the old teachers. I'm used to them. Some here are mean."</i></p> <p><i>"The second worst thing is the teachers don't want us, I know they hate me."</i></p> <p><i>"I get in more trouble with the teachers because they think I am talking back and being smart when I'm just answering a question."</i></p> <p><i>"I haven't been learning as much at this school because the teachers spend most of their time fighting and arguing"</i></p> <p><i>"the teachers don't really help a lot"</i></p> <p><i>"the teacher make me feel left out"</i></p> <p><i>"the teacher or school not help us [with] our school work"</i></p> <p><i>"Certain teachers – she doesn't like their teaching styles – student feels that teachers here are not as experienced working with students with disabilities."</i></p> <p><i>"some of the teachers are very boring"</i></p> <p><i>"some of the teachers don't teach the way they should"</i></p> <p><i>"I don't really understand the teacher and the teacher don't go over it"</i></p>	<p><i>"teachers and some regular ed students have shown an interest in working with and talking to [name deleted]"</i></p> <p><i>"he talks with several adults in the building."</i></p> <p><i>"she engages with staff..."</i></p> <p><i>"he smiles and is willing to try... he talks to teachers in the halls"</i></p> <p><i>"...is accepted by all his classmates and teachers."</i></p>
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	<p>"I don't like some of the teachers and how they were talking to me when I didn't get my work done."</p> <p>"I hate about this school is these security guards and some of these teachers, they don't understand us more."</p> <p>"I hate teachers"</p> <p>"I don't like the fact that none of the teachers don't care about failing us with a chance to redeem ourselves."</p> <p>"Not enough teachers or counselors talking to you and trying to help you."</p> <p>"I do not like some of my teachers"</p>	
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The quantitative results show that the means for item 2 of the school belonging survey are not correlated between student and teacher responses, suggesting that students and teachers had very different perspectives about whether teachers were interested in the student. The qualitative data provide richer detail into why this quantitative disagreement is the case. There are three distinct differences between student and teacher reports. The first is the frequency of the theme of teacher and student relationships. Students reported on student-teacher relationships far more often than the teachers did, as evidenced by the quotes in Table 17. The second difference is that the teachers gave all positive reports, while students gave more mixed results. Teachers indicated that students were accepted by teachers and that they saw students engaging with teachers, while students reported both negative and positive experiences. The final difference between students and teachers is in the content; students reported a wider variety of issues with teachers than teachers did themselves. Students not

only indicated that their new teachers were “nice” or “mean”, but also that staff were “caring and supportive,” “excited to teach” or that teachers “hate” them and spend “all their time fighting and arguing.” The results suggest that students may be more preoccupied with their relationships with teachers than the teachers. Additionally, the results suggest that while teachers view student-teacher relationships positively, students have a more mixed view of the relationships.

The school belonging survey also inquires about whether the student is included in activities in their school (Table 18), which has a direct bearing on school inclusion.

Table 18: Qualitative responses related to whether the student is included in activities

	<b>Student Qualitative Reports</b>	<b>Teacher Qualitative Reports</b>

<p>I'm/this student is included in lots of activities at my/this school</p> <p>Student Teacher Correlation =.27 (p = .01)</p>	<p><i>"we do more activities"</i>  <i>"more activites" [indicated as one of the best things about the move to the new school]</i>  <i>"there is more activites here in the new school"</i>  <i>"they have a lot of activities here"</i>  <i>"the programs" [indicated as one of the best things about the move to the new school]</i>  <i>"I like this school; more activities than the other school."</i>  <i>"more activites"</i>  <i>"I get to experience more activities with people like after school activities and during school activities"</i>  <i>"I like that it's a lot of fun and activities you can get into so you wont be hanging around on the street."</i>  <i>"[school name deleted] has more extra curricular activities, more teams and sports, more opportunities and offers."</i>  <i>"I played football for the first time... at [school name deleted] we weren't able to play football."</i>  <i>"I like the fact that I can choose from different activities like chess club, and a lot of other clubs."</i>  <i>"it has more sports"</i>  <i>"the two best things are meeting new people and playing ball for a well known school."</i>  <i>"it is the sports" [indicated as one of the best things about the move to the new school]</i>  <i>"I like that we have a winning sports program"</i></p> <p><i>"let them do more activities like go to more classrooms"</i>  <i>"we used to go swimming at [school name deleted]"</i>  <i>"I wish that we can get more activities during school instead of after school so that the students can show their intelligence... I mean things we can do that educate me but at the same time having fun"</i>  <i>"Wish there would be clubs and teams he could be on"</i>  <i>"there are no basketball teams"</i>  <i>"I wish there were teams for wheelchairs"</i>  <i>"I need a bus for after school programs"</i></p>	<p><i>"always participates during class activities"</i>  <i>"she has been involved in a girls group to make friends"</i>  <i>"[name deleted] enjoys actively being a part of the community aspect"</i>  <i>"more involved in activities in general"</i>  <i>"volunteers in class and makes valuable contributions"</i>  <i>"[name deleted] participates actively"</i>  <i>"...always participating actively"</i>  <i>"is an active participant in class activities"</i>  <i>"He participates in concerts given by the school"</i>  <i>"He tries to be involved in school activities, example student counsel."</i>  <i>"participates very willingly in all our class and inclusion opportunities"</i></p> <p><i>"...seems a bit withdrawn during class, participates if asked."</i>  <i>"...wants to participate in afterschool activities" [indicated as a problem]</i>  <i>"[name deleted]'s music teacher had issues with him not participating"</i>  <i>"Student does not participate"</i>  <i>"he would like to have bus service so that he can stay for after school activities."</i></p>
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Student and teacher responses to the school belonging item on activities were correlated, and qualitative data show that both students and teachers were concerned with access to activities. However, as with other belonging items, students had much more to say on this topic. When reporting that they were involved in activities, students often compared their new school to their prior school, explaining that there are “more activities than the other school” or that the school “has more extra curricular activities.” When reporting that there were problems accessing activities, one student pointed out that his disability status was a factor, “I wish there were teams for wheelchairs.” Another student indicated that she needed bussing for after school programs, a necessity for many students with disabilities. This student report is echoed by teachers, who pointed to bussing and after school activities as a problem, for example one teacher explained “he would like to have bus service so that he can stay for after school activities.” Teachers however, had a different perspective than students, often focusing on whether the student is participating. This focus is on the student’s initiative, whereas students focused more on the availability and accessibility of activities.

The fourth item on the school belonging survey asked whether students are treated with respect (Table 19).

Table 19: Qualitative responses related to whether the student is respected

	Student Qualitative Reports	Teacher Qualitative Reports
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I/this student am/is treated with as much respect as other students	<i>"the students are nicer here"</i> <i>"Friendly students that help me open doors and get books out"</i> <i>"everyone is nice to me"</i>	<i>"... is a respected member of the groups"</i> <i>"is an accepted member of his random group"</i> <i>"peers look forward to him being a part of their team"</i> <i>"being treated in a fair and friendly manner by other students"</i>
Student Teacher Correlation =.08 (p = .40)	<i>"the kids here are the meanest kids I ever seen because if you talk to them they laugh at you."</i> <i>"some kids need to be respectful"</i> <i>"People make fun of you"</i> <i>"Respect people" [indicated as something the student would like to change]</i> <i>"the kids make me mad because [they think] they are better than me"</i> <i>"kids talk about people, call me Bobby Brown and stuff"</i>	

Student and teacher responses to the fourth item on the school belonging survey were not correlated, and this is reflected in the qualitative data. Teachers described positive instances of respect in which students are treated fairly and are considered "respected" or "accepted" members of the school community. Students described being treated with kindness as a sign of respect, but most of the student reports were negative when it came to respect. Students explained that other students are teasing and making fun of them, and that they would like to change their schools by increasing respect. Overall the lack of agreement between students and teachers on the issue of respect may be explained by the content of the student complaints. Teachers may not see students being treated disrespectfully in the manner the students describe, in which they are teased, called names and laughed at. The students being disrespectful are likely to hide this behavior from adults. Therefore, teachers may see instances of respect and acceptance in the classrooms, but out of the classrooms, when teachers are not present, the students may experience more disrespectful behavior from peers.

The final question on the school belonging survey asked whether the student had good friends at school (Table 20).



Table 20: Qualitative responses related to whether the student has friends

	Student Qualitative Reports	Teacher Qualitative Reports
<p>I/This student has good friends at school</p> <p>Student Teacher Correlation = .305 (p = .01)</p>	<p><i>"my friends listen to me more at this school"</i></p> <p><i>"I got best friends at this school."</i></p> <p><i>"I have not met anyone I didn't like"</i></p> <p><i>"nice people go here"</i></p> <p><i>"lots of them in this school that trying to be my friends"</i></p> <p><i>"I get to meet new kids"</i></p> <p><i>"I have new friends"</i></p> <p><i>"meeting new people" [indicated as one of the best things about the move to the new school]</i></p> <p><i>"I know a lot of people"</i></p> <p><i>"I meet a lot of friends"</i></p> <p><i>"I have a lot of friends"</i></p> <p><i>"having lots of friends" [indicated as one of the best things about the move to the new school]</i></p> <p><i>"I have a friend at this school"</i></p> <p><i>"I got to be with most of my friends from my neighborhood"</i></p> <p><i>"the only thing I like about moving here is my friends"</i></p> <p><i>"I'm making more friends than last year"</i></p> <p><i>"I have nice friends here"</i></p> <p><i>"I like the fact that I make new friends"</i></p> <p><i>"more friends here"</i></p> <p><i>"my new friends" [indicated as one of the best things about the move to the new school]</i></p> <p><i>"I get to make new friends"</i></p> <p><i>"a lot of new friends"</i></p> <p><i>"I made new friends that are great"</i></p> <p><i>"good friends here"</i></p> <p><i>"I made a lot of friends"</i></p> <p><i>"I meet a lot of friends here that I enjoy being around."</i></p> <p><i>"lots of student that I know now than I used to know"</i></p> <p><i>"new friends"</i></p> <p><i>"I like [school name deleted] better than [school name deleted] because I made more friends."</i></p> <p><i>"I like being around lots of people and meeting new people. It's kind of an exciting experience but at the same</i></p>	<p><i>"Acquisition of new friends"</i></p> <p><i>"He seems to have a lot of friends"</i></p> <p><i>"She has lots of friends"</i></p> <p><i>"good peer interaction"</i></p> <p><i>"is getting along fine with peers"</i></p> <p><i>"[name deleted] has lots of friends"</i></p> <p><i>"is doing well socially"</i></p> <p><i>"...is making new friends"</i></p> <p><i>"has developed many friends and relationships"</i></p> <p><i>"[name deleted] gets along with all the students in the class"</i></p> <p><i>"He appears to have made some friends from what I have observed in the hallways and classrooms"</i></p> <p><i>"has made great progress when mainstreamed; he has made friends!"</i></p> <p><i>"has made several friends at the school"</i></p> <p><i>"he is actively enjoying meeting new people and making new friends."</i></p> <p><i>"has made friends, like to help others and gets along well with others"</i></p> <p><i>"has a lot of friends"</i></p> <p><i>"he sits and socializes with different people in the lunchroom all the time."</i></p> <p><i>"currently has a lot of friends"</i></p> <p><i>"he has a good relationship with friends."</i></p> <p><i>"student socializes with his [school name deleted] friends on a regular basis."</i></p> <p><i>"has problems with relationships"</i></p> <p><i>"social problems still being worked out"</i></p> <p><i>"wants to isolate self..."</i></p> <p><i>"student feels as though he is alone. Has no friends except those who came here. He thinks he has no friends."</i></p>

	<p><i>time very worrying”</i></p> <p>“here it seems only a couple of kids know me.”</p> <p>“I don’t like some of the kids at this school”</p> <p>“I had to remeet other people.”</p> <p>“I don’t really know anyone”</p> <p>“making new friends” [indicated as a problem with the move to the new school]</p> <p>“I have few friends to talk to”</p> <p>“I miss my friends and teachers – they were more understanding of my needs”</p> <p>“at [school name deleted] I knew lots of people.”</p> <p>“I’d like to have more friends here”</p> <p>“did not get to come with old friends”</p> <p>“I didn’t know anybody”</p> <p>“the people in this school period” [indicated as something the student would like to change]</p>	
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Student and teacher responses to the fifth question of the school belonging survey were correlated, and the qualitative responses correspond in that both students and teachers gave more positive than negative reports. The responses

also showed that students and their teachers had much to say on the topic of friendships, indicating that building friendships may be one of the most important tasks following a transition. Most students reported that they had made friends following the transition, and that this was one of the best things about their move to their new school. However, a number of students indicated that they did not have new friends and often missed their old friends and teachers following the transition. Teachers noticed whether students had or had not been making friends, and their positive qualitative reports were similar to student reports in that they indicated that students were actively making friends and were excited and happy about this. Teachers were less insightful when students had problems making friends, and did not indicate that student missed old friends and teachers.

#### **Social Resources Subscale**

The social resources subscale showed a very interesting correspondence between the qualitative and quantitative data (Table 21). Quantitatively, student and teacher responses to the first question, whether the student has fun at school, were correlated. Students described their school as “fun” in only a few instances, and described not liking or being bored at school more often. Teachers were more positive, indicating that students played at school (at times too much) and were “funny and cheerful.” In only one instance did a teacher describe a student in a way that indicated that they were not having fun at school and in that case the teacher explained that the student was sleepy. On question two of the resources scale, which asks whether any teachers or other school staff understand the student, teacher and student responses were not correlated. The qualitative data

show why there may have been no relationship between student and teacher responses. In the qualitative data students reported only negative experiences while teachers reported only positive experiences. Students indicated that they did not have teachers who were experienced with student with disabilities and that they did not get enough time to talk with teachers and counselors. Teachers explained that students had built rapport with adults at school, such as aides, and also described how some students felt, indicating that they did, in fact, understand how the student felt, or was trying to understand. These results suggest that students and teachers do not view their relationships in the same way, and that students view their relationships with teachers more negatively than teachers.

Table 21: Qualitative responses related to Social Resources items

	Student Qualitative Reports	Teacher Qualitative Reports
Do you/this student have fun at this school?	<i>"It's fun"</i> <i>"more fun here"</i> <i>"it's fun to be here"</i>	<i>"he is very funny and cheerful. He likes to joke with me and sometimes with other staff members."</i>
<i>Student Teacher Correlation = .218* (p = .03)</i>	<i>"I hate this school"</i> <i>"I don't like the stuff here"</i> <i>"I don't like it"</i> <i>"I do not feel comfortable at this school"</i> <i>"kids don't leave the classroom... the kids get bored because of that."</i>	<i>"I notice [name deleted] smiling and laughing in the hallways"</i> <i>"He has a best friend and sometimes they talk and play too much during class."</i> <i>"He plays with many other students in a very good natured way."</i> <i>"she seems happy throughout the day"</i>  <i>"[name deleted] tends to get very sleepy and not able to focus in class."</i>
Do any teachers/ counselors/ coaches really understand how you/this student feels?	<i>"I get in more trouble with the teachers because they think I am talking back and being smart when I'm just answering a question."</i> <i>"the teachers don't want to have us here, I know they hate me."</i> <i>"The teacher make me feel left out"</i>	<i>"He enjoys his aide who is very good with the students"</i> <i>"I have asked the counselor to speak to [name deleted]. She seems to have greater emotional swings than normal."</i> <i>"he was upset in class and I had him talk to a school counselor to</i>
<i>Student Teacher Correlation = -.168 (p = .10)</i>		

<p>“Not enough teachers or counselors talking to you or trying to hep you.”</p> <p>“Certain teachers – she doesn’t like their teaching styles – student feels that teachers here are not as experienced working with students with disabilities.”</p>	<p>help resolve it.”</p> <p>“[name deleted] seemed stressed at the beginning of the school year. She mentioned that she felt pressured about making decisions concerning her future.”</p> <p>“student was scared because she didn’t know what to expect. Generally she was nervous about it.”</p> <p>“has good rapport with his individual aide”</p> <p>“She looks like a happy, well adjusted child.”</p>
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### Social Stressors Subscale

As with the school belonging scale and social resources subscale, the social stressors subscale was examined by item for agreement or disagreement between teachers and students, and data types (Table 22).

Table 22: Qualitative responses related to Social Stressors items

	Student Qualitative Reports	Teacher Qualitative Reports
<p>Do/es you/this student have arguments or fights with any students at school?</p> <p><i>Student Teacher Correlation =.12 (p = .25)</i></p>	<p>“the kids here are the meanest kids I ever seen”</p> <p>“Get into arguments”</p> <p>“these kids always trying to talk about you and trying to fight you Like very day”</p> <p>“Friendly students that help me open doors and get books out”</p> <p>“I have not met anyone i don’t like”</p> <p>“Lots of nice people here”</p> <p>“Everyone is nice to me”</p> <p>“The students are nicer here”</p> <p>“it’s a nice people that go here”</p>	<p>“He gets along with everybody.”</p> <p>“Student seems to interact well w/peers”</p> <p>“The student has developed a good relationship with the students”</p> <p>“He seems to get along well with the other students”</p> <p>“Gets along well with [school name deleted] students”</p> <p>“She seems to get along well with the other students.”</p> <p>“gets along well with others”</p> <p>“Good peer interaction”</p> <p>“She is interacting well with her peers and she has a positive attitude”</p> <p>“is getting along fine with peers”</p> <p>“able to get along well with peers”</p> <p>“has fit in wonderfully with our</p>

		<p><i>"he loves interacting with other students. The students in his classroom enjoy working with him as well"</i></p> <p><i>"He likes to mingle with non-disabled peers"</i></p> <p><i>"Fits in well with classmates"</i></p> <p><i>"She gets along with her peers very well."</i></p> <p><i>"Works well with other students"</i></p> <p><i>"He plays with many other students in a very good natured way"</i></p> <p><i>"gets along with all the students in class"</i></p>
<p>Doe/s you/this student have argument or fights with any teachers, coaches, or counselors?</p> <p><i>Student Teacher Correlation = .08 (p = .49)</i></p>	<p>"The second worst thing is the teacher don't want have her I know they hate me"</p> <p>"[staff] are meaner and they don't listen to you"</p> <p>"the teachers spend most of their time fight and arguing with children"</p> <p>"I hate Teachers"</p> <p><i>"Ms. [name deleted] especially is nice."</i></p> <p><i>"I like the teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers are more helpful"</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers and lunches are nice."</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers are great."</i></p> <p><i>"Like [name deleted], Res. Teacher"</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers-they're nice here"</i></p> <p><i>"You get more help from the teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers are nice"</i></p> <p><i>"This school has nice teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"Like my new teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"It has better teachers"</i></p>	<p><i>"friendly with teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers + some reg ed students have shown interest in working w/ + talking to [name deleted]"</i></p> <p><i>"he talks with several of the adults in the building."</i></p> <p><i>"He enjoys his aide"</i></p> <p><i>"he likes to joke with me and sometimes with other staff members"</i></p> <p><i>"is accepted by all his classmates and teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"She engages with staff"</i></p> <p><i>"works well with teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"currently works well with her classmates, aide, and teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"seems to like her teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"he talks to teachers in the halls"</i></p>
<p>Do students at school make fun of, criticize, or disapprove of this</p>	<p>"People may tease you"</p> <p>"People make fun of you"</p> <p>"the kids that talk about people; call me Bobby Brown and stuff."</p>	<p>"Has problems with relationships"</p> <p>"probs fitting in socially."</p> <p>"Wants to isolate self when"</p>

you/student?		criticized, or feels she is being criticized."
Student Teacher	<i>"Friendly students that help me open doors and get books out"</i>	"Being treated fairly and in a friendly manner by other students." [as a problem following the transition]
Correlation = .17 (p = .11)	<i>"I have not met anyone i don't like"</i>	
	<i>"Lots of nice people here"</i>	
	<i>"Everyone is nice to me"</i>	
	<i>"The students are nicer here"</i>	
	<i>"it's a nice people that go here"</i>	
		<i>"is a respected member of the groups"</i>
		<i>"He gets along with everybody."</i>
		<i>"Student seems to interact well w/peers"</i>
		<i>"The student has developed a good relationship with the students"</i>
		<i>"He seems to get along well with the other students"</i>
		<i>"Gets along well with [school name deleted] students"</i>
		<i>"She seems to get along well with the other students."</i>
		<i>"gets along well with others"</i>
		<i>"Good peer interaction"</i>
		<i>"She is interacting well with her peers and she has a positive attitude"</i>
		<i>"is getting along fine with peers"</i>
		<i>"able to get along well with peers"</i>
		<i>"He likes his classmates"</i>
		<i>"He sits and socializes with different people in the lunchroom all the time"</i>
		<i>"is accepted by all his classmates"</i>
		<i>"has fit in wonderfully with our class/his classmates"</i>
		<i>"works well with teachers and classmates"</i>
		<i>"currently works well with her classmates"</i>
		<i>"he loves interacting with other students. The students in his classroom enjoy working with him as well"</i>
		<i>"He likes to mingle with non-disabled peers"</i>
		<i>"Fits in well with classmates"</i>
		<i>"She gets along with her peers very well."</i>
		<i>"Works well with other students"</i>
		<i>"He plays with many other</i>

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		<i>students in a very good natured way”</i> <i>“gets along with all the students in class”</i> <i>“has integrated socially”</i>
Are any teachers, coaches or counselors critical or disapproving of you/this student?	“Some teachers need to change their attitude” “Some [teachers] here are mean” “I don’t like some of the teachers and how they were talking to me” “I would like for the discipline teachers to listen to the students problem instead of thinking they are right all the time”	<i>“I have attempted to make this the class he can enjoy, feel good about, be safe and challenge himself. I hope this will be a lightening rod for other success.”</i> <i>“Teachers + some reg ed students have shown interest in working w/ + talking to [name deleted]”</i> <i>“he likes to joke with me and sometimes with other staff members”</i> <i>“is accepted by all his classmates and teachers.”</i> <i>“She engages with staff”</i> <i>“works well with teachers”</i> <i>“currently works well with her classmates, aide, and teachers”</i> <i>“seems to like her teachers”</i>
<i>Student Teacher</i> <i>Correlation = -.16 (p = .15)</i>	<i>“Ms. [name deleted] especially is nice.”</i> <i>“I like the teachers”</i> <i>“The teachers are more helpful”</i> <i>“The teachers and lunches are nice.”</i> <i>“The teachers are great.”</i> <i>“Like [name deleted], Res. Teacher”</i> <i>“Teachers-they’re nice here”</i> <i>“You get more help from the teachers”</i> <i>“The teachers are nice”</i> <i>“This school has nice teachers”</i> <i>“Like my new teachers.”</i> <i>“It has better teachers”</i>	
Is there too much pressure to compete with other students at school?		
<i>Student Teacher</i> <i>Correlation = .05 (p = .65)</i>		
Do any teachers, coaches, or counselors expect too much of you/this student or give you/her/him too much homework?	“a little difficult – too many class” “They make me work too hard.” “The work is more challenging” “work is harder” “More homework at this school. Also more classwork” “Too much homework” “the work is real hard”	
<i>Student Teacher</i> <i>Correlation = .04 (p = .74)</i>	“Sometime the work is the worst” “The work is a little hard” “Some of the class is hard” “I also don’t like the fact that none	

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of the teachers don't care about  
failing us with the chance to redeem  
ourselves"

*"The academics are more  
challenging which is good"*  
*"this school is more challenging"*  
*"Classes that are more challenging"*  
*"gives me more of a challenge"*  
*"The work is more challenging"*  
*"do new and more challenging  
things"*  
*"I have more of an challenge"*  
*"created new challenges"*  
*"I was never taught by teachers who  
were this strict. I learning now"*  
*"The teachers are a whole lot  
different. They don't try to give you  
a free ride just "because you are in  
a chair. They expect you to do what  
you are capable of doing."*  
*"I like college prep schools plus I  
get homework everyday."*  
*"Work seems just right."*  
*"how they have you working hard"*

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As can be seen in Table 22, the lack of agreement between students and teachers in the quantitative data is mirrored by a lack of agreement in the qualitative data. Students presented instances of arguing and fighting with teachers and staff, while teachers only provided examples that countered the item. Students provided far more descriptions of not getting along with peers than their teachers did. Students also had much to say about the amount of work they were given in their new schools, while teachers remained silent on this issue. The trend in the qualitative data shows that teachers provided many more descriptions of positive social experiences than negative. Although students also had more positive than negative descriptions, they had more negative things to say about the social situation in their new schools than the teachers appeared to be aware of.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the results of the data comparison show that there was substantial convergence between the qualitative and quantitative data. By examining the relationship between the transformed qualitative data and the quantitative scale means, it was possible to see that most of the qualitative data significantly predicted the quantitative results above and beyond demographic variables. The second comparative analysis compared the data types by quantitative item, and with this analysis further correspondence and disagreement between data types could be seen. The matrices show that there is an overall correspondence between the qualitative and quantitative data. First, for each of the quantitative items on the school belonging and social resources surveys, there were corresponding qualitative reports from students and teachers. This is noteworthy because the qualitative items only asked respondents to identify what they liked or did not like about the school and problems and the attempted solutions to those problems. The presence of qualitative data that matches with the quantitative items is a confirmation of the importance of school belonging and social interactions to school inclusion and school transitions. Another way in which the qualitative and quantitative data correspond is that when student and teacher quantitative responses showed a positive correlation, their qualitative responses were more similar than when there was no correlation. When there was no correlation between student and teacher quantitative responses, the qualitative data clearly illustrated the differences in perspective. The comparison in the matrices showed a close correspondence between student and teacher reports, in both quantitative and qualitative data for most issues. However, this correspondence was not

evident when it came to students having negative experiences with teachers themselves. The qualitative data showed that students sometimes felt unsupported and even disliked by their teachers (“I know she hates me. Sometimes I feel like I don’t belong here”), but teachers did not report difficulties in their relationships with students. The correspondences and contrasts between student and teacher data will be explored in greater depth when answering the guiding questions

#### **Phase 4 Data Integration: Addressing the Guiding Questions**

The findings of the previous analytical steps were integrated, and further analysis was performed in order to address the guiding questions.

#### **Guiding Question I: What problems and opportunities do teachers encounter when attempting to include students with disabilities in their classroom?**

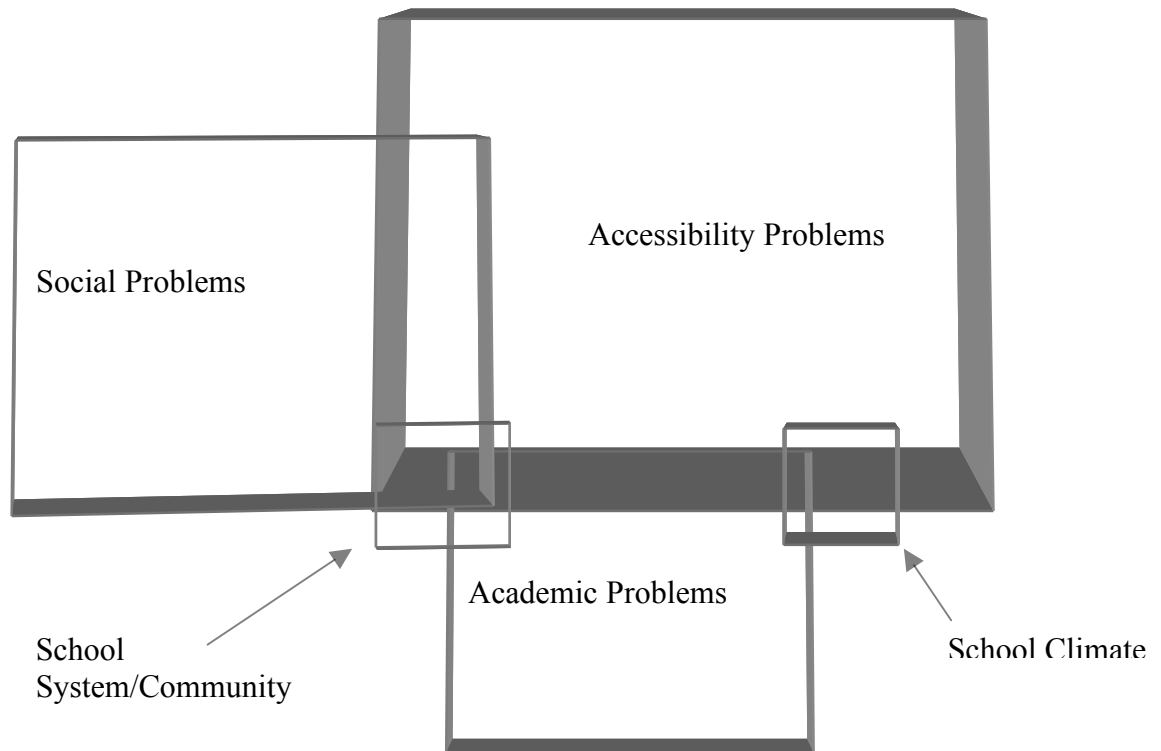
To examine what problems and opportunities teachers encountered, the qualitative data was examined. During the reduction and transformation stages of the analysis, five overall cross-cutting themes emerged as most salient to both students and teachers: academics, social, accessibility, school climate and school system/community issues. Problems and positive experiences within these themes were examined quantitatively (Figure 5) giving an indication of what were the most frequently reported issues, and therefore, what may be most salient for teachers when including students with disabilities. In terms of problems, the results of the frequency count suggest that teachers viewed accessibility (85) problems as the primary issue of concern for the transitioning students.

Accessibility was followed by social issues (26), academic issues (25), school

climate issues (16) and school system/community issues (12); in the order presented.

While the number of codes representing each theme was calculated (Figure 5) giving an idea of how important or common a particular issue is to the teachers, more can be done to understand what problems came up and how they were experienced. Another point of interest may be not only how many times an issue came up, but whether teachers who reported multiple problems reported similar sets of issues. Knowing this information may help us to understand if certain problems are likely to co-occur following a transition. For example, if teachers reported accessibility problems, did they commonly notice social issues as well? If so, it would be worth further exploration of the data to see why the two issues are related. In order to explore the possibility that types of problems may co-occur, the “overlaps” among the problem types were examined. Here, “overlaps” refers to teachers reporting more than one problem. So, for example, if the same teacher reports accessibility and school climate problems, then this is counted as a single instance of overlap between negative accessibility and school climate issues. The amount of overlap among problems in the five cross-cutting themes was calculated and is represented in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Problem overlap in the teacher qualitative data



In Figure 7 the size of the squares represent the number of teachers who reported a problem in a particular theme. For example, 32 teachers reported accessibility problems, so the sides of the square for accessibility are 3.2 inches long. The thickness of the lines making up the squares are determined by the number of times a theme was coded in the overall data set. So, while 32 teachers reported accessibility problems, there were 85 instances of coded accessibility problems in

the data, indicating that those 32 teachers often reported the issue multiple times in their responses. This gives some sense of the relative importance of the issue for the teacher. Teachers who reported an issue multiple times often described the issue in greater detail across all four units of analysis (the four open-ended questions asked of the teachers) and emphasized the importance of the issue by their focus on it. To return to the example, in Figure 7 the line thickness for the accessibility problems square was set to 85.00 in order to represent that the theme occurred 85 times among the 32 teachers. By thickening the lines, the figure shows the “depth” of the issue to those who reported it, or the “thickness” of the narrative they gave about the problem. In this way one can see both number of participants reporting a problem, and how salient the problems were for them. This kind of multidimensional graphic is particularly useful when comparing problem types.

### ***Accessibility Problems***

Teachers focused most on accessibility problems, giving them prominence over the other issues in the data. Accessibility problems were reported by more teachers, and when accessibility problems were reported they were described in more detail. Teachers also saw accessibility issues as related, or at least co-occurring, with every other problem type. This finding is illustrated in Figure 7, which shows that accessibility issues have overlap with all other issues. This finding shows that teachers had great sensitivity to the overall accessibility for the students following the transition to more inclusive environments. Teachers focused on several kinds of accessibility problems worth exploring in more detail:

inaccessible classrooms, wheelchair issues, elevator problems and extracurricular activities.

### ***Inaccessible Classrooms***

Multiple teachers pointed out that inaccessible classrooms were an obstacle to including the transitioned students. For example, one teacher explained that “computer classrooms are not modified to accommodate” and therefore the student about whom he was reporting on could not participate. Another teacher pointed out that the music classroom that was scheduled for the transitioned student was inaccessible, and this kept the student from participating. Another teacher noted that one of her main concerns prior to the student arriving was whether or not the classroom itself could accommodate the student.

### ***Wheelchair Issues***

Closely associated with inaccessible classes were problems related to wheelchair use. The same teacher who worried whether her classroom could accommodate the transitioned student explained that the main issue was how the student’s wheelchair would fit: “[the student] uses a wheelchair and one concern was how he would navigate our classroom.” Another teacher worried that more problems would come up for the student because “there are always proximity and special (LRE) concerns when operating her wheelchair.” Teacher concerns about potential wheelchair problems were borne out in at least one case. One teacher explained that her student “sat in a classroom for five weeks without instruction because there were physical problems – room could not accommodate her chair.” In two instances students who needed wheelchairs refused to use them in their

new environment. Teachers did not explain why this may be the case, but it may be worthwhile to speculate that students transitioned into an environment with students not using wheelchairs may have felt less inclined to use them. The problem appeared to have a very negative effect on one of the students, as reported by the teacher, “He is depressed and often falls in the building and does not want to use a wheel chair.”

### ***Elevator Issues***

Another accessibility problem that emerged from the teacher reports were problems with elevators. While multiple schools were reported to have elevator problems, one school in particular was reported on the most, and this was the school that took the most students in the sample. One teacher from that school simply wrote “elevator issues” or “lateness due to elevator” for 13 students transitioned to that school in response to the question “what issues have come up for this student during the transition.” Another teacher at the school provided more detail, explaining that “due to elevator out of service for 4 weeks, he hasn’t been in my class.” It is likely that being unable to attend class for four weeks because of a broken elevator was a very frustrating experience for both the teacher and student. However, it was not just the largest school that had elevator problems. A teacher at another school reported that “elevator issues remain major.” Teachers at multiple schools reported frustrating instances of elevator outages that negatively affected attendance and participation for the students. For example, one teacher explained that an issue that had come up for her student was “lateness to class due to elevator breakdowns” and when asked if the problem had



been addressed she wrote “not really!” Student reactions to elevator issues were varied, from angry to resigned, and will be explored in greater detail when answering guiding question two. However, the same teacher who reported that the problems had not been addressed also explained that the student “...is a senior, so she is just going with the flow til graduation.”

### ***Extracurricular Activity Issues***

Extracurricular activities were also a concern that teachers had in terms of accessibility. A teacher indicated that the primary issue that came up for her student was “integration into extracurricular classes.” Another teacher pointed to what may be an obstacle to integration, explaining that while the student “wants to participate in after school activities” there were “no after school activities for students riding the school bus.” This represents an accessibility problem for some students with disabilities, who cannot get accessible transportation or walk home after an extracurricular activity that occurs after school hours. The teacher who described her wheelchair-refusing student as “depressed” went on to explain that “...he would like to have bus service so that he can stay for after school activities.”

Overall, the accessibility problems that teachers described appear to have a direct impact on the students’ ability to participate fully and build a sense of community in their new schools. Given the range of problems that fall into the accessibility theme, it is not surprising that accessibility problems overlapped with all other problems to some degree. Teachers indicated that students missed important academic opportunities because of a lack of accessibility, such as

attending class on time, or in two cases, at all. Given these results, it is not surprising that accessibility problems overlapped with academic problems. Students were also hindered from joining in on extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities are an important aspect of the school experience, allowing students to take advantage of greater learning and social opportunities than can occur in a classroom setting. These issues, along with building problems like elevator outages and inaccessible classrooms, may come together to create a school climate that is unwelcoming to students with disabilities. In transitions such as the one these students and teachers experienced, accessibility is a critical need and could be a major obstacle to inclusion and to developing a sense of community.

### ***Social Problems***

Student social problems were another important concern that teachers focused on in their qualitative responses. Teachers reported that following the transition some students were withdrawn and had trouble fitting in at their new school. Multiple teachers used very direct phrases to indicate that their students were having social problems such as “he has problems with relationships” or has “problems fitting in socially.” Teachers appeared to be very sensitive to students’ social needs and were able to perceive when students were not getting their social needs met. Teachers noticed when students felt negative emotions because of social problems and appeared to empathize with the students. As a teacher explained, “student feels as though he is alone. He has no friends except those who came here. He thinks he has no friends.” Another student was described as

“feeling alienated from the larger student body.” One teacher described her student as “very shy” and explained that he “didn’t always want to speak in class even if he knew the answers.” Another student was described as “a bit aloof” and one was described as “a loner.” Although social problems overlapped with academic, accessibility and school system/community problems, teachers viewed social problems as a primarily individual issue. Teachers often described social problems as being a problem with the individual student adjusting to the new school community, rather than a problem with the community adjusting to the new student. This individualistic view of social problems is evident in the fact that school climate and social problems did not overlap in the teacher data. The individual nature of social issues also came through in teacher descriptions of how these problems were addressed. For the most part, teachers explained that the students became more “adjusted” and began to “make new friends” and “communicate more” as time went on. Teachers also indicated that for those students who continued to have social problems, they anticipated that the students would become more socially connected and outgoing as time went on. For example, a teacher indicated that her student seemed “somewhat shy about joining in with the students during the first week” but had overcome this shyness and was “fitting in.”

### ***Academic Problems***

In terms of academic problems, teachers pointed to a number of different issues affecting academic performance, including students not doing work, not understanding, doing poor work and a lack of supports and resources for students.

Teachers explained that some of the students were “unwilling to learn and do work”, that the student “doesn’t do work” or “refuses to do work.” The frustrations of these teachers following the transition was clear in the writing, for example, when asked for the current status of the issue a teacher wrote that “the student still doesn’t do work” and another simply wrote, “she is currently failing.” Teachers saw problems with students not understanding the academic work, and in several cases teachers connected this to a lack of adequate supports. One teacher described her student’s situation this way “There is only one special ed teacher and one case manager. He[the student] doesn’t seem to understand what’s going on. He wasn’t getting adequate help.” A teacher in the same school pointed out the same problem with inadequate staff and noted that his student “wasn’t getting the help that he needed. He wasn’t understanding the assignments.” A teacher in another school appeared to connect the student’s academic problems to a more basic lack of connection with the school, which showed itself in the student not coming to school and feeling alone, “Student is failing due to absence. Student is absent due to lack of comprehension. Student is very concerned about failing. Student is a loner.” The quote illustrates the way in which lacking a sense of community in school can affect a student’s academic performance.

Some teachers were concerned that students were not coming to school adequately prepared to do work, and that following the transition some students were not adjusting to their new schools academically. One teacher responded to the item asking what issues have come up for the student with “behavior – unprepared (suddenly) unwilling to learn and do work” and another teacher wrote

that though their student was turning in work, it was “poorly done.” There may be many reasons why students were coming unprepared and doing poor work, however one teacher hinted that the reason for her student may be disability, “Student has difficulty coming prepared to school/class, bringing materials such as books because he states that they are too heavy to carry.”

Overall, in terms of academic problems, teachers had a view that was balanced between individual and ecological factors. While most of the teachers reported that the problems stemmed from individual issues such as students’ lack of work, lack of preparation or poor work, teachers also saw a lack of supports as an important issue. Additionally, there is a suggestion in one instance that disability may play a factor in a student’s academic problems.

### ***School Climate***

The concept of “school climate” is not one that is readily defined because it does not refer to something concrete. Despite the lack of clarity about school climate, it is important that school climate be recognized and accounted for, particularly given that it plays such an important role in the literature on school inclusion (Lehman, 2004). School climate in this study refers to descriptions of the overall school environment, and these descriptions can be of physical, social or emotional aspects of the environment. For example, an environment can feel hostile or welcoming, accessible or inaccessible, crowded or empty.

Teachers had very few things to say about the school climate in terms of problems. In several instances teachers suggested that the climate may not be suitable for the transitioned student because an “appropriate placement” could not

be found. However, teachers rarely described what an appropriate placement might be or what about the current placement was a poor match for the student. Some teachers pointed out that the transition itself had difficulties that led to students not feeling welcome in their new school. One teacher described an instance in which a student felt alone and did not know people at her new school, “I’ve talked with her about it and tried to explain that because the transition happened so fast, the receiving schools had no time to plan introduction to socials to get to know one another.”

### ***System/Community Issues***

The least reported theme was system/community issues. This theme included problems or issues which affected the transition of the students but which were outside of the school itself. Many of these issues revolved around getting more help from the larger school system to make the school more accessible. For example, in 6 of the 13 instances in which teachers described a problem with the elevator they also pointed out that the district office “needs to assist in this area.” In other cases teachers indicated that they wanted more help from the school district with the overall transition, “we are working hard on solutions including those we can directly create and those we need CPS [the district] help with.” In terms of community issues, teachers focused primarily on the involvement or lack of involvement from parents. A teacher who had a problem with a student who was late to class “thirty percent of the time” explained that she “cannot reach anyone at home.” Teachers also reported that parents were “unavailable for IEP” and therefore “information was unavailable.”

Other teachers who were in contact with parents explained that parents were “apprehensive about change.” One parent had difficulty because she “had to change her schedule” and “did not know what to do about childcare.”

### ***Conclusion***

In answering the question of what problems teachers encountered following the transition to school inclusion, it was found that teachers experienced problems primarily with the accessibility of the school building, the social adjustment of the students and the academic performance of the students. Teachers also described some issues with the school climate in terms of the transition presenting problems because it was done too quickly or there was no appropriate placement for the students in the new school. Finally, teachers pointed out that there were problems in the larger school system in that the school needed help and was not receiving it and that there were community issues in that parents were worried or not communicating with teachers. Overall, the findings support the ecological understanding of school inclusion and the transition. The problems that the teachers described appear to be located at different ecological levels. Some problems were perceived as occurring at the individual level with the students themselves, such as some academic and social problems, others occurred in the school itself, such as accessibility and school climate issues, and still others occurred outside the school in the school system or community.

**Guiding Question II: What problems do students with disabilities encounter when being included in general education classrooms?**

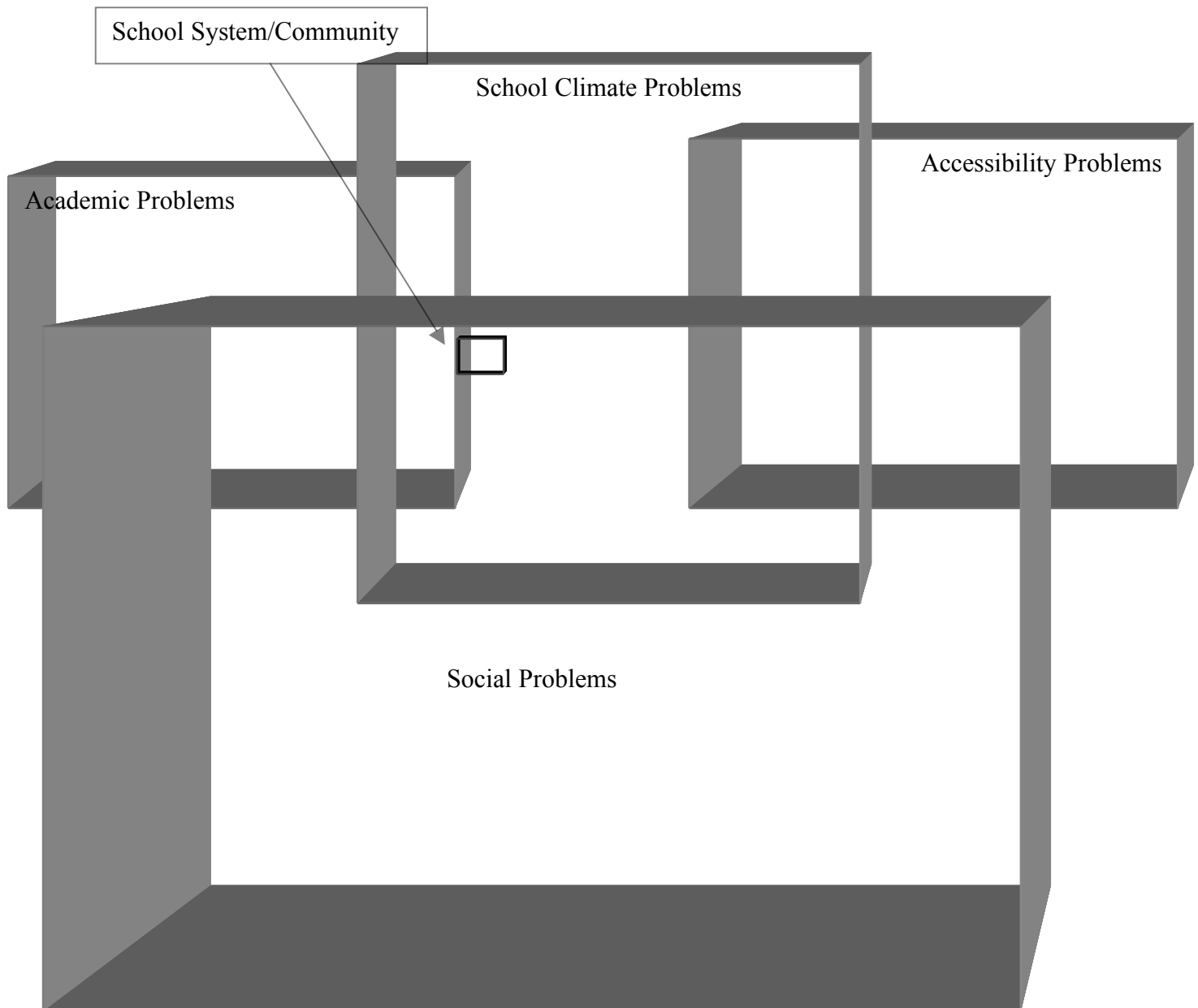
As with teachers, to answer the question of what problems students faced when transitioned to more inclusive environments, the qualitative data was examined. Again, as with teachers, the problems that students described fell into the five general cross-cutting themes: academic, social, accessibility, school climate, and school system/community problems. The results of the frequency count suggest that students viewed social problems (116) as central to their experience in the transition. This was followed by accessibility (57), academics (55), school climate (40), and school system/community issues (4); in the order presented. A quick look at the data show that social problems were far and away the single largest issue for the transitioned students. The prominence of social problems for the students is clear in the frequency of social problem codes, which are more than twice the number of the second most frequent issue. The data show that for the students, social problems are the most common obstacle that they face when transitioning to inclusion. Secondly, it appears that although students and teachers emphasized different problems, students and teachers both viewed social, academic and accessibility issues as the three most important kinds of problems that come up during a transition to inclusion.

As with the teacher data, the degree of overlap among reported problems was calculated. The procedure used to calculate overlap for student problems was the same as that used with teachers. If a student reported two types of problems, this was recorded as a single instance of overlap between the two problems types. For example, when a student reported an accessibility problem and a social problem, this was counted as a single instance of overlap between social and



accessibility issues. A figure was created to show the overlap (Figure 8), and as with the teacher data, the number of students reporting a problem is represented by the size of the boxes in the figure. The number of times a problem is reported is represented by the thickness of depth of the box lines.

Figure 8: Overlap among problems in the student qualitative data



**Social Problems**

In the qualitative data students described social problems in terms of difficulties with school staff, teachers and peers.

### *Staff*

In terms of the problems that students had with school staff, students reported problems with school security guards and with their personal aides. Students focused on their perceptions of being disliked and of having little sense of control in these relationships. With security guards, students explained that some of them seemed unfriendly. For example, one student reported that “the security guards are meaner and they don’t listen to you.” When asked what students would like to change about his or her new school, one student wrote, “make security care about students” and another wrote, “well, we need some new security guards.” The primary problem with student aides was that the students did not get along with their new aides and were not happy with the amount of time with the new aides. For example, in response to the question of what she would like to change about the new school, one student who could not write for herself responded to the teacher assisting her: “her aide – both the person and the fact that she has to have a person ALL DAY.” However, while some students felt they were not getting enough free time without an aide, other students felt they were not getting enough support from aides. One student wrote that the school needs “...more helpers aides-that way in case there is an absence, someone would be available.”

### *Teachers*

Of all the social issues that students reported, not getting along with teachers was the single most frequently reported, at 33 instances (however, there were 27 reports of liking the new teachers). Students who described problems with teachers connected these problems to feeling a diminished sense of belonging at their school. For example, one student explained “the teacher makes me feel left out” and another student reported that “the teachers don’t want to have us here. I know they hate me.” At times it is not entirely clear what teachers were doing or not doing in situations where students felt dissatisfied by the relationship with them. In a few instances students pointed to teacher “attitudes” or communications as a part of the problem. For example, one student indicated that “some teachers need to change their attitude” and another student explained that “I don’t like some of the teachers and how they were talking to me.”

Some students also criticized the teaching style of their new teachers, explaining that “some of the teachers don’t teach the way they should” and “[teachers] need to put forward more effort in making sure the students understand the lesson.” Another student explained “I don’t like this school because I don’t really understand and the teachers don’t go over it.” While student complaints about teaching styles may be related to disability issues, it is not clear from student reports whether this was, in fact, the case. However, in one instance a student pointed out that his teacher lacked an understanding of disabilities, “this student feels that teachers here are not as experienced working with students with disabilities.” Another student alluded to feeling misunderstood by teachers, which may be related to disabilities. When asked what she would like to change about

her new school she replied, “teachers – they don’t understand us more.” Students also missed their teachers from before the transition and connected this to problems with their new teachers, “[I] miss the old teachers, I’m used to them, some here are mean.”

### *Peers*

In terms of social problems with peers, students pointed to three main issues; that they were teased by peers, that they had difficulty making new friends and knowing people at their new school, and that students at their new school did not understand or were not familiar with students with disabilities.

Teasing, bullying and being “picked on” was a salient theme for many of the transitioned students, and could be seen as a critical issue facing students with disabilities transitioning into more inclusive schools. One student explained that a problem with her new school was that “people make fun of you.” Other students explained that “I didn’t like coming here because the kids are always trying to talk about you” and “the kids talk about people; call me Bobby Brown and stuff.”

One student described being laughed at, “the worst thing about moving from school to school is the kids; here the kids are the meanest kids I ever seen because if you talk to them, they laugh at you.”

Some students described feelings of alienation and loneliness after being transitioned to the new school. For example, one student described his experience of the transition this way, “Everyone knows you at [the prior school]. Here it seems only a couple of kids know me,” another student wrote “I don’t really know anyone.” Another student wrote that one of the worst things about the

move to his new school was that “I didn’t know nobody.” Some students pointed out that the process of making new friends was difficult for them. For example, one student answered that one of the worst things about the move to his new school was “you have to get to know more people.”

Some students reported that when they transitioned into their new school, they found themselves in an environment where disabilities were unfamiliar and not well understood. One student reported that she had difficulty fitting in with peers at her new school because of her disability, “some students were uncomfortable with the other kids because they had a disability.” Another student pointed out that the lack of familiarity with disabilities put her in an uncomfortable position with the other students in that they asked many questions, “a lot of people in this school is not like me so they be asking a lot of questions.” In answering what students would like to change about their new school, students indicated that “some kids need to be respectful”, another simply wrote “respect people” and another student explained that “people need to be nice every day of the year.” One student responded by explaining that the school needed to “accept more kids with disabilities, there are very few kids with disabilities.”

### **Accessibility Problems**

Students described many different problems with the accessibility of their new schools that closely mirrored the teacher reports of accessibility issues and expanded on them. Students reported a lack of ramps, wheelchair issues, elevator problems, and inaccessible school structures such as classrooms, doors and hallways.

***Ramps***

Ramps were an important issue that many students at a variety of schools wrote about. Students wrote that there were “no ramps” at their new school, that they “would like wheel chair ramps between floors” because “I ride a powerchair and am able to go down ramps myself.” An important connection in the data on ramps was that students saw ramps not only as an accessibility issue, but as an important safety issue. One student explained that “we need more ramps and another way to get out if there was a fire”, and another student wrote that the school needs to “put ramps in school for emergencies.” Another student wrote that having ramps at their previous school led to a feeling of safety that was lacking at the new school, “students felt safer when we knew there were ramps.” With these quotes it can be seen that students associated accessibility in their new schools with feeling safe and comfortable there.

***Wheelchair Issues***

Closely connected to student reports of a lack of ramps were student descriptions of problems related to wheelchair use in their new school. Some students felt that there were not enough accessible supports for wheelchair users in their new school. For example, one student explained that “we need to have a place to have wheel chairs fixed” at school. Students in wheelchairs explained that they “wish there were teams for wheelchairs” and “more games in the gym for wheelchairs” as well. One student in a wheelchair complained that because of a lack of accessibility during a job training, he “has to watch” and cannot participate. The lack of accessible structures for wheelchairs led at least one

student to feel he was not really included. The student who complained that he wanted more time out of his wheelchair and connected this with being included with regular education students, “[I want to] get out of my wheelchair and have more time in rest of building with reg ed population.” These quotes suggest that an important aspect of inclusion, and of students feeling a sense of belonging to the school community, is basic accessibility for students using wheelchairs throughout the school building.

### ***Elevators***

Broken and slow elevators were also a problem that students wrote about. Students explained that the “elevators are too small”, “are too crowded,” “don’t work properly” and that there are “a lot of people that need to use the same elevator.” One student pointed out that though her school has elevator service it “needs more elevators” and another explained that “there is no kind of room in the elevators.” Students connected elevator problems to participation and attendance in their classes. Students complained that the elevators are “very slow” and that this made them late for class. For example, one student wrote that “elevators don’t get me to class on time and I have to leave early to get somewhere on time.”

### ***Inaccessible Structures***

Students pointed out that some school structures were not easy to use and were inaccessible for them. These were structures that teachers did not pick up on as important to accessibility in their own reports. When describing what they would like to change about their new schools, students described inaccessible school structures like doors (“the doors can be automatic and easy for me to get



into”) and hallways (“[need more] space in the classrooms and hallways”). One student wrote that he “would like to change the number of students in the hallway” as it was difficult to get to class on time. Another student pointed out that it was difficult for her to get to class “because they have so many stairs to walk up to get to class” and another student complained that the school “has too many floors.” Students also described other general problems with accessibility, such as the need for specialized equipment “make classes more accessible – needs more special stuff so we is not sitting watching the kids do stuff.”

### **Academic Problems**

Another theme among student problems during the transition was academics, and there appeared to be several types of academic problems including problems with the curricular requirements at their new school, problems with the new workload and difficulties with teachers that interfered with academic performance.

#### ***Changing Curricular Requirements***

Some students reported that they had difficulty with the changes in academic requirements after the transition to their new school. One student wrote that “I would like to change the requirements... because it is something that I don’t need and don’t like” and in response to the question “what would you like to change about your new school” a student wrote, “some classes I have already taken would be one” and another student wrote “the different requirements at this school.” A student reported that one of the worst things about the move to the new school was that “the class requirements are different.” Some students felt that they

had too few classes at their new school (“I need another class”) while others felt they had too many. For example, when asked what was the worst thing about the move to the new school one student replied “how many classes they have” and another student responded “I only want three classes.” It is worth noting that teachers also reported this problem and conveyed frustration that students had to retake classes or had to take classes that were not well suited to the student’s needs. This correspondence shows that in terms of academic issues, this was a problem that both students and teachers experienced following the transition.

### ***New Workload***

Another academic problem that came up for students was the change in the amount of work required at the new school. Primarily, students reported that the workload increased following the transition, and that this was difficult for them to adjust to. For example one student wrote, “the work here at [school name deleted] is hard and the work at [prior school] was so much easier.” Students wrote that at their new school “they make me work too hard”, or that “the work is real hard”, or “sometimes the work is the worst” and another wrote that the new school was “a little too difficult – too many classes.” One student complained that the pace of the work had increased, and that “they don’t let me finish the work in class.” Students complained about the amount of homework given, “more homework at this school, also more classwork.”

### ***Teacher Difficulties***

Some students who described academic problems linked their problems to difficulties with teachers. One student wrote that they wanted more academic

advice at their new school and that they felt unsupported there, “not enough counseling talking to students about the grades and what they need to do to graduate.” Another student who reported getting her first failing grade also explained that he did not think the teachers were supportive enough, “I don’t like the fact that none of the teachers don’t care about failing us with the chance to redeem ourselves.” One student reported that she felt the teachers were not giving her the opportunity to learn “I would love for the teachers not to take away my learning chances and instruct more so I can learn more.” Again, it should be pointed out that while many students reported having difficulties with teachers (33), a minority of these students connected difficult student/teacher relationships to academic problems.

### ***School Climate Problems***

As with teachers, school climate in this study refers to students’ perceptions of the overall school environment, physically, socially, and emotionally. Students described problems with the overall climate of their new schools more frequently than did their teachers. School climate problems came in a number of kinds for the students, such as the physical environment (felt their schools were noisy or dirty, too big, and overcrowded), and the social environment (a sense of limited freedom at the new school, and a need to adhere to stricter rules). Some students also reported problems with the social environment of the school in that it was not diverse enough in terms of ethnicity or disabilities.

A student who complained of the noise at his school explained that if he asks a question “the class don’t be quiet for me to hear or understand what they are saying.” Students who felt that their school was not clean were very direct, “this school is dirty” and “it’s a newer school but it’s still dirty.” Some students had problems with the physical size of their new school, as one student explained their new school is “too big, it’s difficult to find the rooms.” Students also described overcrowded conditions in the school, “some of the classes have too many kids in them,” and one student connected the overcrowding directly to his not socializing “I never went to a school with this many students so that causes me not to talk a lot.” Some students reported a greater need for diversity. One student complained that the climate was especially unwelcome to students with disabilities, pointing out that the school needed to “accept more kids with disabilities, there are very few kids with disabilities.” Another student explained that he “would like to have more Hispanics in this school.”

Overall, these school climate problems were strongly connected to student descriptions of having negative emotions about their school. Some students described feeling alienated and emotionally disconnected from their schools. Students who thought that the overall school climate was not welcoming explained, “I hate it here,” “I hate this school” and another wrote “I feel like I don’t belong here.” This last quote ties the student’s sense of belonging to their school community to whether the school climate is welcoming, which emphasizes the need for a supportive school climate when transitioning students to inclusion.

This finding also reaffirms the importance that the literature has placed on creating a supportive community for inclusion of students with disabilities.

### ***System/Community Problems***

Like teachers, students had little to say about system/community issues, however, what they did describe was very important. Students who reported on issues outside of the school that affected them primarily described gang violence in the school and neighborhood. One student complained that the problem with his new school was “the gang fights and everyone not liking each other for stupid reasons” another also wrote that the problem was “the violence, the gang fights.” One student lamented that he had been transferred to his new school because “it is known for mainly violence and gangs” and reported that his main concern was “being targeted.” These concerns are important aspects of the overall transition because they illustrate how a student can view a transition as a loss of safety, rather than as an increase in opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

Overall the most striking feature of the students’ reports of their problems is the overarching theme of social relationship issues and how interwoven social issues are with every other problem. Student discussed social concerns far more often than teachers; and even when they described other kinds of problems, they often also described social problems as being related or co-occurring. This extensive reporting of social problems may suggest that the primary issue for students being included is whether or not they can make and maintain positive social connections with peers and adults. This emphasis on the social may be

particularly true for students with disabilities who are moved into a new school, separated from friends and familiar teachers, and asked to begin constructing their social support system anew.

**Guiding Question III: To what extent do the problems and opportunities encountered by students and teachers affect students' sense of belonging to a school community?**

To answer the question of whether the problems and opportunities in the school transition have an effect on students' sense of belonging to a school community, both the qualitative and quantitative data were examined. Specifically, the quantitative school belonging scale was examined to gauge students' sense of belonging, and the qualitative data were examined to uncover problems and opportunities that may influence belonging. This analysis was performed during the data comparison phase. While causation cannot be established from the data, the results of the analysis showed that reports of problems following negatively predicted student school belonging. These findings suggest that school belonging may be negatively affected by the kinds of problems that occur after a transition to school inclusion. The details provided in the qualitative data that was examined in the second analysis of the data comparison also suggest that school belonging may be diminished when student/teacher relationships are poor. Conversely, the qualitative data examined in the second analysis of the data comparison suggest that when students have positive experiences, particularly with teachers and peers, they may also have greater belonging.

***Social marginalization and belonging***

Students who reported social problems with peers primarily focused on the experience of being teased and bullied, and sometimes reported feelings of isolation and alienation that are contraindicative to belonging (e.g. “I really don’t know anyone”). Another student wrote “the kids here are the meanest... because if you talk to them they laugh at you.” It is likely that the teasing, bullying and a lack of friendships these students experienced serve to marginalize students with disabilities further in their new schools and maintain their status as outsiders. An example of feeling one’s outsider status can be found in one student’s description of the problems she faced when moving into her new school, “students were uncomfortable around the other kids because they had a disability.” It is likely that these difficulties with peers, from blatant teasing to more subtle discomfort, made it more difficult for students with disabilities to develop a sense of belonging in their new school communities.

***Belonging and student/teacher relationships***

An important trend in the data is that the issue of student belonging was most salient in the student qualitative data when problems with teachers were reported, and students connected their feelings of belonging more directly to teachers than to peers. For example, one student explained, “the teacher make me feel left out”, and another student wrote that “the teachers don’t want to have us here, I know they hate me” which was directly followed by the statement “sometimes I feel like I don’t belong here.” This correspondence between student belonging and problems with teachers shows that teachers probably play an

important role in helping students belong to their new school communities following a transition. At times students described difficulties with teachers in a way that could affect belonging. For example, one student wrote “I haven’t been learning as much at this school because the teachers spend most of their time fighting and arguing” and another student wrote “I don’t like the fact that none of the teachers don’t care about failing us with the chance to redeem ourselves.” In these statements students who are having difficulties with their teachers are also describing a situation in which it would be difficult to feel welcome as a new student.

Conversely it is likely that supportive relationships with teachers could encourage belonging in the school community. Students who reported positive experiences with their new teachers reported more positive experiences of the school. For example, many students (27) reported that one of the best things about the move to their new school was their new teacher. Some students explained that teachers were academically supportive, for example “the teachers are more helpful,” and “the teachers break the work down more so you can understand it.” Other students described the teachers as emotionally engaged and supportive, “the teachers here are great” and “Ms. [name deleted] is especially nice.” Also some students were inspired to work to their fullest potential by their new teachers and felt challenged and encouraged by them, “the teachers here are a whole lot different. They don’t give you a free ride just because you are in a chair. They expect you to do what you are capable of doing.”

***A Supportive School Community that Encourages Belonging***



The literature on school inclusion focuses on creating school communities in which all students feel a sense of belonging. However, there is still much to be learned about how creating inclusive communities is done in practice. An important aspect of the qualitative data in this study is that students and teachers described opportunities in their schools as a part of a process that encourages belonging to the school community. Students alluded to opportunities for participation and belonging in their descriptions of their new school. For example, one student explained that moving to his new school gave him the chance to “have more experiences with different things,” and another student explained that “I was able to widen my horizons.” One student also explained that one of the best things about moving to the new school is “that I have a better chance to do and see different things in life.” Another student explained that “I like the fact that I can choose from different activities like chess club and a lot of other clubs.” A student summed up the link between these opportunities to participate in the life of the school and his sense of belonging this way: “I like [school name deleted] because they got more stuff for us in this school – because they got a spot for us in this school.”

Overall, It appears that school belonging deserves the great deal of attention that it receives in the school inclusion literature. The results of the data in this study suggest that school belonging is a critical aspect of the transition and inclusion process for students. An examination of the qualitative data showed that students described feeling whether they belonged (“this new school feels like home”) or did not belong (“Sometimes I feel like I don’t belong here.”) very

directly. These direct statements also attest to the importance belonging has for the students in this study. The quantitative results of the school belonging survey also show a correspondence between negative student experiences and lower school belonging. The problems and opportunities that students and teachers described as part of the inclusion process in the qualitative data appear to have a relationship to students' sense of belonging in their new schools.

**Guiding Question IV: To what extent do student and teacher perspectives on the problems with inclusion confirm or contradict each other?**

Student and teacher perspectives on school belonging, social resources and stressors, and the problems and opportunities following the transition were all examined in the prior stages of analysis. Overall, the results of the analysis show a mix of differences and instances of agreement. What was discovered about student and teacher perspectives in each phase of the analysis will be explored further below and then integrated into an overall understanding of student and teacher perspectives.

***Phase 1: Data Reduction***

In the data reduction phase of the analysis, the Pearson correlations showed that students and teachers agreed on student belonging, had mixed agreement and disagreement on the social resources subscale and definite disagreement on social stressors. While students and teachers agreed overall on school belonging and social resources, the items of the scales assess different aspects of the student experience that contribute to belonging and social support.

Therefore, a deeper examination of the scales was conducted in the data reduction phase in order to get a better understanding of student and teacher perspectives by item. The differences by item between teachers and students suggest that more may be going on than can be seen by only looking at the overall scale means. Students and teachers showed agreement on three of the five school belonging items and disagreement on two items (Table 12). The items for which students and teachers agreed dealt with whether the student “feels like a real part of the school, whether the student is “included in activities” at the school and whether the student had made friends at the school. Two items were found to be significantly different. The first item examined whether responding students were treated with as much respect as other students. The second item asked whether teachers at the school were interested in the student.

In terms of social resources, students and teachers had one agreement and one disagreement, and the correlations and t-tests for these two items were calculated in the data reduction phase. There was significant agreement about whether students have fun at their school. Students and teachers disagreed on whether teachers and other staff at the school really understood how the student feels about things. Given that student data was entered first in the t test, the negative value suggests that students felt that they were less understood than teachers believed. While the scale means suggest that there is an overall agreement between students and teachers, the item analysis suggests that students are less likely to feel that they are treated with respect or that they are understood by teachers and other adults at the school (Table 23). Further, an analysis by item

on the social stressors subscale showed that student and teacher perspectives were very different. There were no significant agreements between students and teachers on any of the social stressors items.

Table 23: Items of Significant Agreement and Disagreement Between Students and Teachers

	Agreement	Disagreement
School Belonging	<p>I/This student feel/s like a real part of this school</p> <p>I'm/this student is included in lots of activities at my/this school</p> <p>I/This student has good friends at school</p>	<p>I/this student am/is treated with as much respect as other students</p> <p>Most teachers at my/this school are interested in me/this student</p>
Social Resources	Do you/this student have fun at this school?	Do any teachers/ counselors/ coaches really understand how you/this student feels?
Social Stressors		<p>Do/es you/this student have arguments or fights with any students at school?</p> <p>Doe/s you/this student have arguments or fights with any teachers, coaches, or counselors?</p> <p>Do students at school make fun of, criticize, or disapprove of this you/student?</p> <p>Are any teachers, coaches or counselors critical or disapproving of you/this student?</p> <p>Is there too much pressure to compete with other students at school?</p> <p>Do any teachers, coaches, or</p>

		counselors expect too much of you/this student or give you/her/him too much homework?
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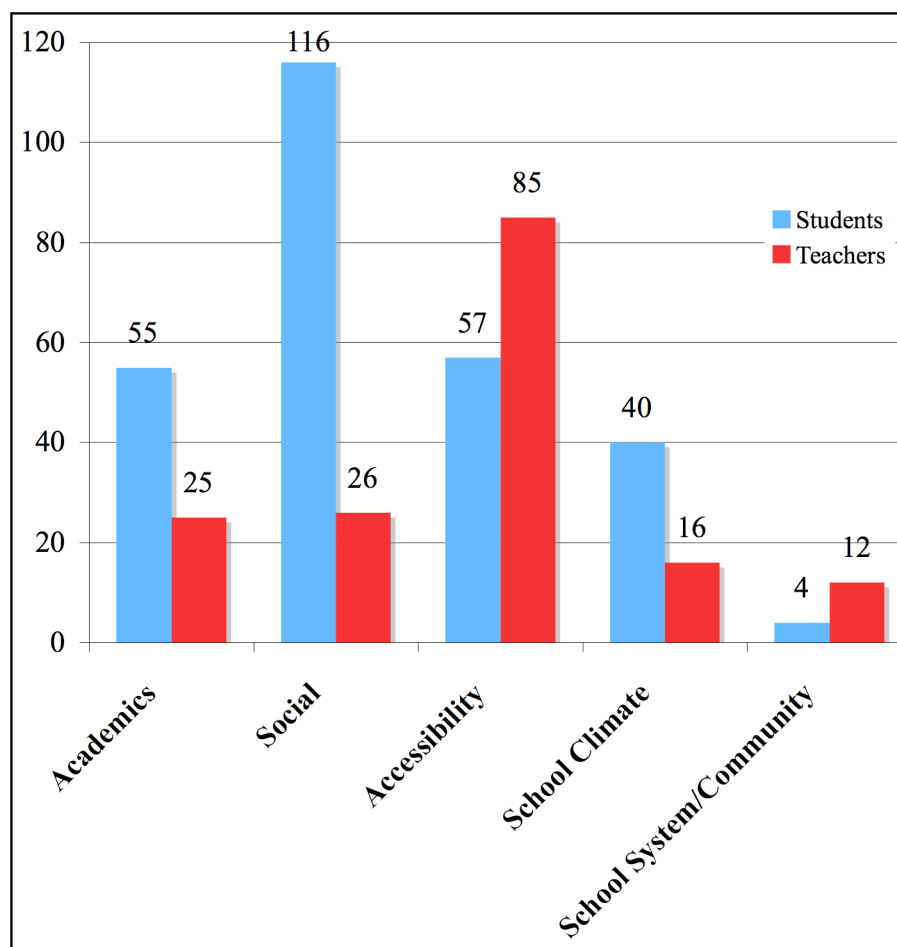
While the reduction of the quantitative data showed mixed agreement and disagreement between students and teachers, the qualitative data in the data reduction phase showed that both students and teachers had a shared focus on five overall themes (Table 9). The shared focus on the themes illustrated that both groups agreed on the basic content of the most salient issues following the transition. While some codes could not be included in the cross-cutting themes, the great majority of codes fit into the framework, showing substantial agreement on what was important following the transition.

Interestingly, the initial phase of the analysis appears to show that students and teachers had a similar focus in their qualitative responses, but had different perspectives in the quantitative analysis. This finding suggests that there is a complex picture emerging in which teachers and students both agree and disagree on different aspects of the transition.

### ***Phase 2: Data Transformation***

In the data transformation phase of the analysis the qualitative data was transformed by conducting frequency counts of the five cross-cutting themes. What was found was that students viewed social problems as most salient issue during the move to their new school, followed by accessibility and academics. Teachers viewed accessibility problems as most salient followed by social and academic problems (Figure 9).

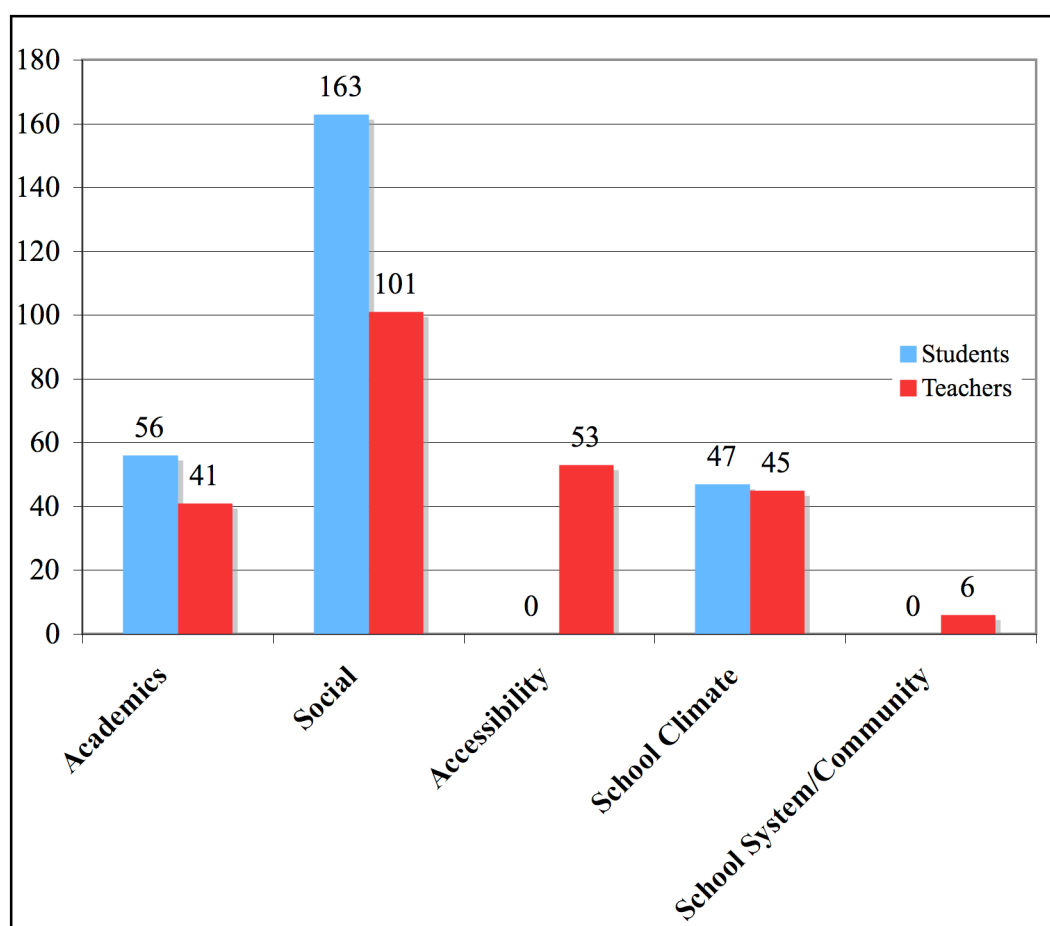
Figure 9: Student and Teacher Frequency of Problem Types



As can be seen from Figure 9, although students and teachers focused on the same problems, they emphasized them somewhat differently. Of interest is the large discrepancies in the academic, social and accessibility categories. Students perceived far more social problems following the transition than teachers were aware of, and teachers focused on accessibility and academic problems more than the students themselves.

Also of interest is whether students and teachers viewed the positive experiences or opportunities in the new school similarly or differently. The frequency of the student and teacher positive experiences is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Student and Teacher Frequency of Positive Experiences



The frequency of positive experiences shown in Figure 10 illustrates that students again emphasized the social aspects of their transition to the new school. Interestingly, teachers also emphasized the social aspect of the students' experience when considering what positive opportunities the student has had during the transition. This area of agreement suggests that students and teachers

may have had similar perspectives on the positive experiences of the students following the transition. The disagreement between students and teachers in what problems were most important is interesting in light of the agreement on positive experiences. This discrepancy shows that teachers may have been aware of how important the positive social experiences of the transitioned students were to them, but may not have been as cognizant of the social problems that the students experienced in their new schools. Teachers may not have known about the social stressors that students were experiencing. This interpretation of the qualitative data makes sense given the differences in perspective found in the data reduction phase, in which students and teachers disagreed completely on the social stressors subscale.

Additionally, it is interesting that students did not report positive experiences with accessibility or with system/community issues. While teachers saw many accessibility problems they also reported positive aspects of accessibility (e. g. elevators were repaired, assignments or activities were modified, etc.). Teachers also saw positive aspects of the larger school system and community (e.g. parent participation, transportation office addressing bussing issues, trainings, etc.). It may be the case that because of teachers' distinctive position in the school, as those who have frequent contact with individual students and with parents, district offices and services, they may be in a better position to see the positive efforts that students do not see. Students may simply not have been aware of the efforts that were being made to address accessibility and larger system issues.



***Phase 3: Data Comparison***

In the data comparison phase of the analysis the qualitative data was compared to the quantitative data. This comparison was done in two ways. First, the transformed qualitative data was tested for significant relationships to the quantitative measures. By investigating whether the transformed qualitative data could significantly predict the quantitative scale means, the two data types could be “mixed” and more easily compared. Secondly, to get a closer look at areas of agreement and disagreement in the data types, each quantitative item’s student-teacher correlation was compared to student and teacher qualitative results that were relevant to the item. It is the second analysis in the comparison phase that has the most to convey in terms of student and teacher perspectives. In this data comparison the student and teacher qualitative data are more closely compared.

It was found that when student and teacher quantitative responses had a significant positive correlation, their qualitative responses were more similar than when there was no correlation. This comparison is useful in that it may shed further light on the agreements and disagreements between students and teachers. In particular, it was found that when there was no correlation between student and teacher quantitative responses, the qualitative data was able to show the details of those differences. Students and teachers disagreed primarily on items that had to do with the students’ negative experiences with peers or teachers. What the qualitative data reveal is that students reported a mix of positive and negative experiences with teachers and peers, but teachers reported positive social experiences for students almost exclusively. When teachers did report negative

social experiences, the reports were less negative than those of the students. So while some students reported that peers and teachers argue with them, teachers were more likely to describe the situation as the student “not fitting in.” On items that asked about students’ relationships with teachers and other school staff, students and teachers did not show quantitative or qualitative agreement. Again, as with the items that look at negative experiences with peers, the qualitative data shows that teachers viewed the student/teacher relationships much more positively than the students, who had a distinctly mixed view of their relationships with teachers.

### ***Conclusion***

Overall, the data suggests that students and teachers had important areas of agreement on positive efforts to include the students following the transition. On the other hand, students and teachers viewed the negative experiences of the transition differently. In particular, teachers’ perceptions were more positive overall, while students’ perceptions were more mixed. Both students and teachers agreed that the students felt like a part of the school, were included in activities and had fun and friends at the school. However, they disagreed on whether the students were treated respectfully, had conflicts with peers and adults, were under pressure or had too much work, and whether teachers and other adults at the school really understood the students. It may be the case that some students viewed their relationships with teachers negatively and that the teachers saw them more favorably, and this was reflected in the data as a disagreement between students and teachers. It may also be the case that while students and teachers

were equally aware of positive and negative experiences, they chose to focus their reports on different experiences. It may also be the case that students experienced teasing and bullying at their new schools and that teachers were not aware of the extent to which this was occurring. While the results suggest that teachers understood the students' experiences of some of the most important aspects of inclusion, it also suggests that there were important "blind spots" for teachers. The blind spots that teachers had were primarily for the negative experiences that the students faced following the transition. These results suggest that while teachers are tuned into student successes following a transition, it may take more effort for teachers to know what negative experiences students are facing.

**Guiding Question V: To what extent do the quantitative and qualitative data converge? How and why?**

In comparing the quantitative and qualitative data, it is worth considering that while the quantitative data asks students and teachers about specific experiences following the transition (e.g. "I am included in a lot of activities at this school"), the qualitative items do not ask for specific experiences. Rather, the qualitative items ask students and teachers to report what has been most salient, good or bad, following the transition (e.g. "what are the two best/worst things about moving to your new school?"). The quantitative measures were selected based on the literature on school inclusion, which have found that school belonging and the social dimensions of inclusion are critical. The qualitative items were developed to broadly capture the emergent issues of greatest import to the

respondents. Therefore, if overlap is found between the quantitative and qualitative measures, it is both a confirmation of prior research, and an affirmation that belonging and social support are key aspects of inclusion.

The results of the analysis shows that there was in fact significant overlap between the content of the qualitative data and the quantitative scale items. This correspondence became clear in the data comparison phase of the analysis when the qualitative and quantitative data were compared and contrasted. The comparison showed that the qualitatively reported issues that students and teachers described predicted the quantitative means in a sensible manner.

An important finding from the data comparison phase of the analysis was that the while teacher qualitative reports did predict some student quantitative results, student qualitative data were not associated with teacher quantitative results. What this finding suggests is that teachers' qualitative descriptions of positive and negative experiences following the transition are more predictive of student belonging and social experiences, than teacher quantitative reports. This finding is an important one for mixed method approaches, because it suggests that, at least in this context, teachers are more concordant with students' experiences in qualitative descriptions than in quantitative reports.

Another interesting finding is that while students had much to say about whether too much was expected of them or whether they received too much homework, teachers had no qualitative reports on this topic. This difference in perspective was mirrored in the student-teacher correlation for the student expectations item that showed no agreement ( $r = .04$ ,  $p = .74$ ). Lack of agreement

on appropriate expectations for incoming students may be an important factor for the student/teacher relationship following the transition. If students are struggling with the workload but teachers are not aware of this, the teachers may assume that the student is simply not prepared or willing to do the work.

A finding of interest in the data comparison was that there were no qualitative data that corresponded to the quantitative social stressors item “Is there too much pressure to compete with other students at this school?” Apparently, this was not an experience that teachers or students had anything to say about in the qualitative data, suggesting that the item itself taps into something that was not salient for either group. This is itself an important finding that sheds some light on the experience of the transition. Students transitioned into school communities where they rarely if at all experienced too much pressure to compete with other students. While it cannot be inferred from this finding that the school communities were therefore supportive, the literature on school inclusion paints a picture of school communities where pressure to compete is not prominent. Inclusion literature emphasizes the need to create school communities where the focus is on appreciation of every student’s contribution, rather than on the need for students to compete. The fact that neither students nor teachers had anything to say about pressure to compete speaks to the possibility that schools were working to create supportive school communities.

### ***Conclusion***

Overall it was found that there is a great deal of correspondence between the qualitative and quantitative data. Even in those instances where the data types

did not converge, the lack of convergence provided insight into the overall transition and the process of inclusion. These findings support the use of mixed methods when studying complex experiences across multiple groups in multiple settings.

**Guiding Question VI: What actions have been taken or proposed to address the problems encountered by students and teachers when implementing school inclusion? To what extent have these actions addressed the problems?**

To examine what actions have been proposed to address the reported problems, and the extent to which they have worked, the results of the open-ended qualitative question “What is the current status of these issues” on the teacher survey were examined. Additionally, student qualitative data were examined for reports of problems being addressed. The reports matched the cross-cutting qualitative themes for the most part, so matrices were created matching reported actions to these themes (Tables 18 - 23). The reported problems are academic, social, accessibility, system/community problems and school climate issues. However, social problems were the largest overall category of problems (Figures 9 and 10) and included both experiences with peers (e.g. not making friends, loneliness) and difficulty with teachers and staff (e.g. disobeying rules, “behavior problems”). Therefore separate matrices were composed for actions taken to address social problems with peers and teachers. The actions taken to address to these problems were initiated and carried out in some cases by either teachers or students and the initiator is indicated within the matrices when applicable.

The first set of actions taken to address problems deal with academic issues and are presented in table 24. As can be seen from the matrix, teachers reported their own-actions much more than student-actions.

Table 24: Proposed actions to address academic problems

	Actions Taken to Address Academic Problems
Student Initiated	<p>Student is finally getting organized and is able to keep up with the other students</p> <p>Her absences have decreased, but her taking the initiative to see me and us negotiating due dates has allowed her to stay caught up and earn decent grades for the class.</p> <p>She has arrived promptly to all classes.</p> <p>Starting to turn in work but poorly done.</p> <p>Utilizing resource class to complete work.</p> <p>...volunteers to read whenever she can</p>
Teacher Initiated	<p>I am working with [name deleted] reading problems. She has been working with a list of sight words. Her parent and sister work with her and help her complete homework.</p> <p>[name deleted] receives praise and she is constantly reminded of her good work and effort.</p> <p>She and I worked out that when she is out she needs to see me right away to get notes/missing assignments and we negotiate a due date for their return.</p> <p>Phone calls have been made to mom to discuss issues of accountability for materials and homework.</p> <p>Division teacher made aware of need to leave early. Given 50% of any given lesson to complete</p> <p>I worked with student one on one and during student lunch period three times a week.</p> <p>Whenever [name deleted] completes her class work</p>

	<p>successfully, she is allowed computer access.</p> <p>[name deleted] parent's have been called by at least one or two teachers due to lack of homework and "mouthing off"</p> <p>Positive reinforcement that he is doing well at this school.</p> <p>Student has been given extended time to submit homework, redo classwork and take exams home.</p> <p>He got a schedule change with the hopes of getting more one on one help.</p> <p>Student was reevaluated to get a better handle on academic functioning and level.</p> <p>[name deleted] started working with another friend as partners on worksheets. He was asked simple questions with yes/no answers at first until he felt more at ease.</p> <p>Time to make up work in resource or at home. Amount of work cut, acceptance of verbal responses over written, acceptance of written work length cut.</p> <p>Teachers lowered the reading level and class expectations to match his level</p> <p>Same – not prepared – no improvement after calling home.</p> <p>Student has been advised, consulted, failure notice has been sent out.</p> <p>[name deleted] was given two copies of the textbook. One copy stays at home and one stays at school.</p> <p>Student's home has been called. Student then shows up for a day or so claiming to have been ill.</p>
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The teacher reports show that in a few instances students took actions on their own to try to solve academic problems such as getting "organized", coming to classes on time and asking for help. Teachers provided curricular modifications



to student schedules, to testing, to homework requirements, to the amount of an assignment required for completion, to response modality (verbal vs. written), and to assignment due dates. Teachers also enlisted other students to help by changing seating order so the student with the disability could ask others for help. Some of the ways that teachers addressed problems were notable. One teacher described meeting one on one with the student during lunchtime several times a week in order to give the student extra help. Other teachers described reaching out to families and enlisting them for help. In one case a student was helped with her homework by her parent and sister, and in other cases parents were called and informed of the problems.

Teachers also reported on actions taken to address social problems, and these are presented in table 25. As can be seen in the table, students initiated the action more often to social problems than to academic problems.

Table 25: Proposed actions taken to address peer social problems

	Actions Taken to Address Peer Social Issues
Student Initiated	<p>There are no issues now with [name deleted]. She engages with staff and fellow students... She shares her time with other students and staff.</p> <p>Everything is fine, [name deleted] has fit in wonderfully with our class/his classmates.</p> <p>He has grown quite comfortable with my class and has opened up more on his own without prodding.</p> <p>“Issues have melted away” this is what the student shared.</p> <p>He tries to be involved in school activities, example school counsel.</p>

	He has made many friends in his mainstream classes
Teacher Initiated	<p>Assuring student verbally that he has friends and others care for him as a friend.</p> <p>I have asked a counselor to speak to [name deleted].</p> <p>Talked to parent at open house.</p> <p>One teacher paired student up with others to instill conversation.</p> <p>He was upset in class and I had him talk to a school counselor to help resolve it.</p> <p>He talked to the psychologist concerning his feelings.</p> <p>[name deleted] receives praise and she is constantly reminded of her good work and effort.</p>

Teachers described student initiated actions taken to address social problems in terms of a gradual adjustment to the new social milieu. Teachers explained that the student “opened up”, “made friends” and in one instance the student told the teacher that the issues have “melted away” with time. Teachers took the initiative to help students when they had social problems by assuring them that they had friends and praising the student to boost their self-confidence. Like with academic problems, teachers enlisted the help of other students by pairing the transitioned student with another student to “instill conversation.” School counselors and psychologists also played a role. Teachers sent students to talk with counselors when the social problems became too difficult.

Another type of social problem that emerged in the teacher reports were student problems with teachers and other school staff, described often as behavior

problems. Teachers reported on behavior problems and the actions taken (Table 26).

Table 26: Proposed actions taken to address behavior problems

	Actions Taken to Address Behavior problems
Student Initiated	<p>[name deleted] has backed off the confrontation issue</p> <p>She is now wearing her uniform almost daily.</p>
Teacher Initiated	<p>I had to talk with her grandmother.</p> <p>[teacher name deleted] settled the issue</p> <p>The situation [behavior problems] is under control with [name deleted].</p> <p>Called home, gave warnings.</p> <p>It has been referred to the school social worker to write a letter.</p> <p>We talked as a class. I talked with her one on one. I let her know that this is a uniform school and she must obey the rules.</p> <p>I had a talk with her grandmother.</p> <p>Good – under control. Her mother and I are in frequent communication via telephone.</p> <p>I had a chance to talk to both boys and families.</p> <p>I asked the security people to remove her and [name deleted] when they were threatening each other. She was very angry about this and after several days behaved less belligerently as she entered class.</p> <p>[name deleted] challenges authority inappropriately resulting in suspension.</p> <p>[name deleted] is currently on a behavior plan... his behavior has improved tremendously.</p> <p>Behavior management plan. Give [name deleted] more</p>

	attention.
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Teachers only reported two instances in which students initiated actions to address behavior problems, and in those cases students “backed off” and began following the rules on their own. For the most part teachers reported on problem-solving that they initiated. Teachers reported using discipline such as suspension, giving warnings and in one case the teacher called security to have the student removed. Just as with academic problems and social problems with peers, teachers talked with parents or other family to help change behavior at school. In other cases teachers developed a behavior plan to modify behavior.

Teachers reported actions taken to address accessibility problems and these are summarized in Table 27. Unlike with social and academic problem - solving, teachers did not indicate who initiated the actions taken, therefore this is not included in the table. However, it appears that actions taken to address accessibility problems emerged from systemic efforts with transportation and maintenance organizations affiliated with the school system. Additionally, there appears to be more collaboration in the efforts to address accessibility problems. Multiple individuals from in and out of the school (nurses, bus drivers, case workers, social workers, etc.) are discussed and some attempted solutions, such as schedule changes, require agreement among teachers.

Table 27: Proposed actions taken to address accessibility problems

	Actions Taken to Address Accessibility Problems
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	<p>New bus driver – getting there on time.</p> <p>Student takes the school bus.</p> <p>Bus service was addressed [name deleted] no longer rides the school bus.</p> <p>Mom had to write a note for him to be removed from the bus.</p> <p>Worked with bus company and school nurse.</p> <p>Student has an aide to assist him.</p> <p>[name deleted] was assigned a different aide.</p> <p>Personal aide, extra time to go to and from classes</p> <p>Accommodations seem to aid [name deleted] in traveling class to class.</p> <p>[the student] has plenty of space (LRE) with her wheelchair.</p> <p>She has switched to an accessible music class.</p> <p>Elevators are repaired</p> <p>[name deleted] has another classroom (small setting) on the first floor due to elevator being out of service.</p> <p>Schedule was changed</p> <p>Schedule was corrected.</p> <p>Has been addressed [name deleted] is not on home bound currently, we are working through the affects of illness and treatments.</p> <p>Was told he could bring his guitar to school and use that instead of singing during class.</p> <p>Student has brought a note from OT to specify when he may use wheelchair or arm braces. Student has taken two sets of textbooks one to keep at home and one for school to keep in locker.</p> <p>The case worker has set up a meeting with all important</p>
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	<p>parties to discuss [name deleted] needs and some of these issues.</p> <p>Referred to the social worker and offered the use of a wheelchair.</p> <p>I talked to her teachers, we had an IEP to address possible instruction vs. inclusion classes.</p> <p>Staff in the school have volunteered to transfer him and we had training on proper techniques last week.</p> <p>Modification of lesson was necessary due to slow speed in keyboarding.</p> <p>Continues to receive services to improve her independence</p>
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The actions taken to address accessibility problems ranged from changing bussing arrangements to receiving instructions from occupational therapists. Teachers pointed out that for many students accessibility problems were solved by an increase in resources, such as having an aide, a wheelchair, and in one case a laptop computer. In some cases modifications were made to students' schedules in order to increase accessibility, by allowing students more time to get to and from classes. A notable aspect of the actions taken to address accessibility issues is that teachers described collaboration among school staff often when the problem was accessibility. Teachers participated in IEP meetings, trainings on transferring students from wheelchairs, and had meetings with other school staff to discuss accessibility issues. Overall, the actions taken to address to accessibility problems that teachers describe appear to fall into three categories: modifications to schedules, increased access to resources, and increased staff collaboration.

There were very few instances of system issues described by either students or teachers, and therefore it is not surprising that there were also few actions taken to address system-wide or neighborhood issues described by teachers (Table 28). Three teachers mentioned systemic issues when describing the status of problems, and these teachers pointed to the effort that had been made school-wide to address concerns. One teacher described a suggestion that an inclusion “event” take place at the school in which students and teachers, both special and general education, meet to get to learn about one another. Even as one teacher described school wide efforts, a theme that emerged was that the school district needs to be more involved in assisting schools with inclusion and accessibility.

Table 28: Actions taken to address system/community problems

	Actions Taken to Address System/Community Problems
	<p>[school name deleted] has made tremendous effort to include all students from the planning stages until now and after.</p> <p>It has been suggested that at the beginning of the next semester some sort of event(s) be planned to get inclusion students/teachers together with special ed teachers/students.</p> <p>Issues that can be addressed within the school are continually addressed. Elevator issues remain major (we have one). CPS needs to assist in this area.</p> <p>We are working hard on solutions including those we can directly create and those we need CPS assistance with.</p>

Teachers reported few actions taken to address school climate issues (Table 29). A notable theme in the few instances of problem-solving described

was that in two of them teachers reported that there was an attempt to create a special place or “safe haven” for the student. A teacher who attempted to make her class a “safe” place described a hope that it would be a “lightening rod” for success.

Table 29: Actions taken to address to school climate problems

	Actions Taken to Address School Climate Issues
	<p>New environment for meeting people. More class opportunities</p> <p>I have attempted to make this the class he can enjoy, feel good about, be safe and challenge himself. I hope this will be a lightening rod for other success.</p> <p>Special ed office is a safe haven for him</p>

Overall, the actions taken to address problems during the transition to inclusion mirror the problem types reported by teachers (figure 2). Teachers focused primarily on addressing academic problems, social issues and accessibility. In some instances teachers reported student-initiated solutions to problems, particularly in response to academic and social problems, and in only one instance did teachers report unsuccessful attempts to address problems: when academic problems became worse or did not change.

A key theme that ran through all of the problem-solving attempts was the critical importance of teacher support in order to solve the problems that came up during the transition. In most of the actions described, the reporting teachers initiated the actions or played a key role in helping to ameliorate the problem. Teacher support was an important factor for most of the problems that students



faced. An interesting aspect of this finding was the involvement that some teachers had in solving social problems with peers, either by seating them near other students, reassuring and praising them, referring them to counselors or reaching out to students' families.

However, while teacher support was a critical ingredient in solving the problems that came up during the transition, most of the actions did not appear to be initiated or carried out by the reporting teachers alone. Rather, problem-solving occurred, in part, because of increased resources provided by the school, collaboration among staff, discussions with the student's family, or working in concert with the student. This finding of shared involvement in problem solving confirms the ecological nature of school inclusion and the need for school-wide and school district support in meeting the needs of the transitioning students. This shared involvement finding also fits the descriptions in the school inclusion literature of the inclusion effort as a challenge for and thus a change for the overall school community rather than for a single student, teacher or classroom. Efforts to make inclusion work and solve the problems that come up when students are transitioned into inclusive environments show that solutions are multifaceted and involve the school as a whole.

### **Conclusion to the Integration Phase**

Overall the results of the integration phase of the analysis appear to support four general findings. First, the results of questions I and II, show that there are particular problems which come up following a transition to inclusion, and that these problems are recognized by both students and teachers. Students

and teachers consistently described similar issues that fall into a broad set of categories: academic, social, accessibility, school climate, and system/community.

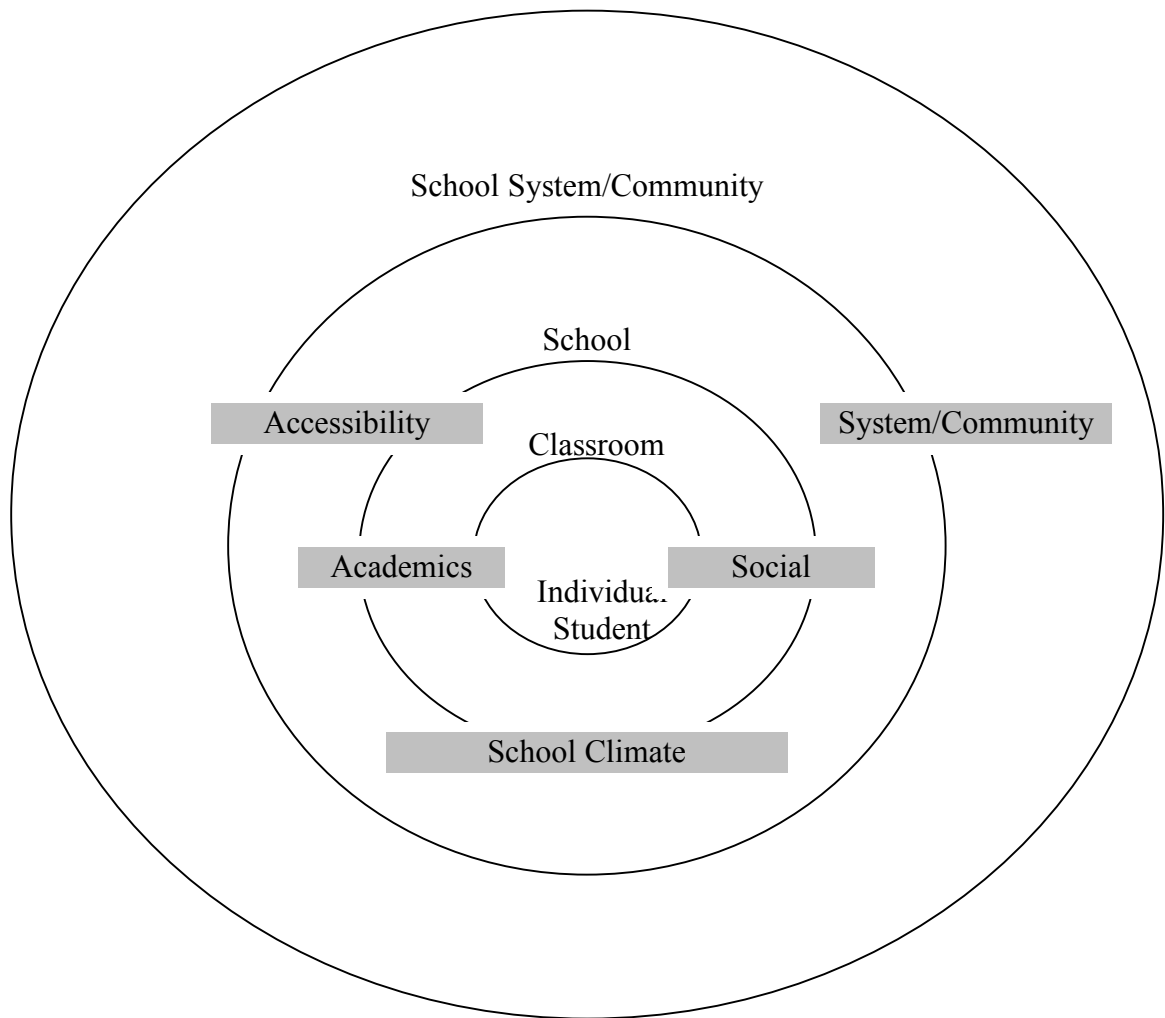
This finding may provide valuable information for future transition planning, and for future efforts to include students with disabilities in general education.

Secondly, the findings of questions I, II and VI illustrate the ecological nature of the school inclusion and transition process. The grounded theory approach to the qualitative data analysis in this study allowed the student and teachers to report on the obstacles and attempted solutions to the transition that were most salient to them, rather than confirming or disconfirming an a priori theory. An important lesson to be learned from the qualitative categories that are grounded in the experience of students and teachers is that school inclusion is indeed ecological.

Qualitatively, students and teachers described a transition in which problems and attempts to solve them were found in the individual students (social and academic), in the classroom setting (social, academic, accessibility, school climate), in the school building itself (accessibility, school climate, system/community issues) and outside of the school (system/community issues).

Figure 11 shows a rough approximation of where in an ecological model the types of problems and attempted solutions occur.

Figure 11: An ecological model of problems and attempted solutions



Given that the picture that the participants have created of the transition fits so well into an ecological model, the overall findings of the qualitative data strongly affirm the ecological nature of inclusion.

Another overall finding that emerged from the analyses is that researchers and educators who emphasize that inclusion is a sense of belonging to a school community are framing inclusion in an appropriate way, according to the experiences of students and their teachers. Using the grounded theory approach, the most important issues to students and teachers were allowed to emerge from the data without a pre-defined theory. In this case, the results showed that both students and teachers were primarily concerned with social adjustment following the move to inclusion, and students and teachers framed this adjustment in terms of belonging. Students described situations in which they did not feel belonging (“sometimes I feel like I don’t belong here”) and when they did (“this school feels like home”, “they got a spot for us at this school”). Teachers also focused on whether the students were “fitting in” and sometimes described the classroom as a “safe haven,” and one teacher even referred to the student’s increasing “sense of community” directly. Taken together, these findings support the focus in the literature that posits that inclusion is a process in which schools become supportive communities to which all students belong.

Another finding that emerged from the data is the critical role that the student/teacher relationship has for students transitioning into new schools. In the examination of the problems faced by students, a theme that emerged was that many students felt that they did not get along with their teachers and this difficulty strongly affected their sense of belonging in the new school. Students also described positive relationships with new teachers as one of the best things about their move to the new school. Students frequently mentioned teachers by

name and described liking their new schools because the “teachers here are nice” and “I like my teacher.” In problem-solving (question VI) the teachers played a crucial role in helping solve the transition problems and support students.

Teachers described collaborating with staff at the school to solve issues as wide ranging as transportation issues and feeling alienated. Teachers met with students over their own lunch break to help them catch up on work, and affirmed the students belonging by showing an interest in them and knowing their struggles.

One issue of concern that the data reveals is that while some students felt their relationships with their teachers was poor, no teachers reported problems in their relationships with the students. This difference may suggest that although students felt unsatisfied with teachers, the teachers themselves may not have been aware or willing to mention this obstacle to student success.

Finally, the findings of these data affirm the importance that peer relationships have for students when making the transition to inclusion. Students cited social issues as both their number one problem, and number one positive experience. The data suggest that students can feel alienated following a transition such as the one in this study if they perceive that their peers are unfriendly.

Students complained that following the transition some of their peers were insensitive to the students’ disabilities and were not used to seeing disabilities. In addition to feeling that peers were not friendly, some students complained that their peers were teasing and bullying them. This alienation was a salient issue for these students, and of concern was that their teachers did not point this alienation in their reports on the students. Following a transition of this nature, where

historically marginalized students are brought into mainstream education, bullying and teasing is a threat to the overall effort because it continues the marginalization in a very direct and humiliating manner. Future planning for transitions to inclusion should account for negative peer interactions and support students in addressing and reducing these stressful interactions.

#### **CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION**

This study examined the experiences of students, most of whom had disabilities and their teachers following a transition to inclusion, and sought to understand the obstacles and opportunities for developing a sense of community at the students' new schools. To study the transition, a multiple-perspective, mixed-method approach was used to examine the problems that arose and actions taken to address the problems for students and teachers following the transition. By using both qualitative and quantitative data from both students and teachers across multiple schools, a more comprehensive understanding of the transition to inclusion was possible. Overall, the data analysis resulted in several findings of importance for school inclusion and school transitions. First, the analysis confirms that school inclusion is an ecological phenomenon. The problems and opportunities of inclusion fall across multiple levels of a broader ecological system that includes the student, classroom, school system and community. This finding fits with descriptions of inclusion and sense of community, which situate the constructs within an ecological framework (Peck, Odom & Bricker, 1993). The second finding of this study complements the first, in that support for the

current understanding of inclusion as a sense of belonging to a school community was found in the data. Both students and teachers focused on sense of belonging in the new schools following the transition in their qualitative reports. Further, the descriptions of belonging occurred without asking participants to describe experiences of belonging, suggesting that belonging was a salient issue for teachers and students. The qualitative information was requested before the quantitative scale on belonging, suggesting that there was no priming for participants to describe belonging issues in their qualitative responses which lends further credibility to the finding. The third overall finding of the study relates well to the first two, in that the results of this study show that the relationships between students and teachers are critical for successful belonging to take place after a transition to the new school community. However, the results also show that students and teachers may have difficulty developing relationships following a transition, and that students may view relationships with teachers more negatively than teachers. The results also confirm the importance of peer relationships to the belonging of students with disabilities in general education settings. Students focused on both the positive and negative experiences of their relationships with peers following the move to the new school. Lastly, the results suggest that there are particular obstacles that occur following a transition, and that for the most part teachers, students and other school staff are able to successfully address these issues. Taken together, these overall findings suggest that school transitions to inclusion are ecological in nature and that schools rightly focus on the ecological aspect of inclusion by building a supportive school

community in which all students can belong. The results also suggest that there are specific obstacles that occur following a transition, and that these obstacles can be successfully negotiated with social support, particularly from teachers and peers.

The findings of this study add to the literature on multiple topics, such as school transitions, ecological studies of community, sense of community, disability studies, and studies of students of color who are marginalized in education. The overall findings of this study show that for students of color with disabilities moving to new schools and being included in general education, a number of specific problem types are likely to arise and therefore may be planned for and addressed. This study also demonstrates the importance of collecting mixed data types from multiple perspectives when studying school-level changes, such as school inclusion. By gathering qualitative and quantitative information from both students and teachers in the same classroom, a deeper and broader understanding of the transition process was possible.

### **Inclusion as an Ecological Process**

The findings of this study affirm the ecological nature of inclusion. Transforming community and creating belonging to community is an ecologically focused endeavor. There is a consensus across the literature that school inclusion efforts which focus solely on individuals (students with disabilities) are not enough for inclusion to occur (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; McCleskey and Waldron, 2000; Solomon, Schaps, Watson & Battistich, 1993). Rather, inclusion efforts are best directed at transforming schools at multiple levels including the



classroom, administration and broader system. The findings of this study affirm this approach by showing that the problems that students and teachers experienced following the transition occurred at multiple levels in the school system. Moreover, the solutions also came from multiple levels, from community connections to involve family members in problem solving, to system-level district transportation and maintenance offices, to teacher efforts to make the classroom environment welcoming, to the students' individual adjustment and social struggles.

The focus on the schools themselves as appropriate targets for inclusion efforts in the research and education literature, speaks to a larger vision for inclusion, one that fosters a deeper appreciation for schools as ecological systems and communities. It is a vision of inclusion which is ecological in essence, because it acknowledges the interrelatedness of the school system to the individual students and the larger community. Beyond merely acknowledging the importance of the school as a community in the literature, adopting an policy of inclusion in schools encourages administrators, staff, and students to consider their school as a community to which they belong. So, inclusion is not only a phenomenon that is ecological in essence, it is also a phenomenon that conscientizes individuals to the community to which they belong. Researchers are aware of this aspect of inclusion, have described school it as a phenomenon that encourages an awareness of the larger community. As O'Brian and O'Brian (2000) have pointed out, "Including students with significant disabilities in general education classrooms heightens the awareness of each interrelated aspect

of the school as a community.” Inclusion efforts not only aim to increase a sense of belonging to a school community, but also to increase awareness of community more generally. Frey and Fisher (2003) describe the underlying value of inclusion in ecological terms, situating it beyond the classroom and school and into the greater community, “The underlying value of inclusive education is that all children should be welcomed members of the classroom, school and larger community” (pp. 1). There is evidence in the findings of this study that this may indeed be occurring for this sample. Both students and teachers took pains to describe the overall school climate and how it made the student feel. One teacher actually referred to the adjustment of their student to the new school as an increase in their “sense of community.”

The conscientization of students and school staff to both the needs of students with disabilities and the overall importance of the school as a community, is also part of a larger ecological vision for inclusion that is described in the literature. In much of the discussion on building inclusive school communities, there is a broader, longer-term vision of inclusion that views inclusive school communities as incubators of change for the larger society. This vision sees a future where students who feel belonging and greater awareness for a school community become citizens who feel belonging for their larger communities, which in turn they transform to become more inclusive (Stainback & Stainback, 2000). Keyes et al (2003) explain that the development of inclusive school communities is considered “...the most significant school reform on the collective journey toward a more just society” (p. 23). Kunc (1992) describes the

translation of school inclusion to societal inclusion as an effort to provide all children with a broader sense of belonging in their communities:

“When inclusive education is fully embraced, we abandon the idea that children have to become ‘normal’ to contribute to the world. Instead, we search for and nourish the gifts that are inherent in all people. We begin to look beyond typical ways of becoming valued members of the community and, in doing so, begin to realize the achievable goal of providing all children with an authentic sense of belonging” (Kunc, 1992).

In the vision of inclusion that many scholars like Kunc (1992) are promoting, school inclusion is one step in a larger effort to create an inclusive society in which everyone belongs. This vision places inclusion efforts as they are conceived and carried out by educators squarely in line with the broader inclusion efforts of disability rights activists.

In the current study, there is some evidence to support the hope that making schools more inclusive will promote a greater sense of community and an appreciation of disability rights both in and beyond the school. Students and teachers did point to issues that arose in the school that may have a broader impact on their community. For example, teachers pointed out that there were school-wide trainings on specific student needs. Multiple staff became aware of the issues that the transitioning students faced (nurses, counselors, social workers, bus drivers and other teachers) and were enlisted to help. Teachers developed a sensitivity to accessibility. In fact, when accessibility issues arose teachers appeared to be more emotional about them than the students, using exclamation

marks and descriptive language to convey the students' predicament. Teachers reported accessibility problems as the top issue in the qualitative responses, and were incensed that some students could not attend classes or participate because of accessibility problems. Overall, the teachers appeared to be learning a great deal about the problems that students with disabilities face, and they reported that they were working with the larger school system and with parents to ameliorate these problems as much as possible. Additionally, both students and teachers reported that general education peers were reacting in multiple ways to having the new students with disabilities in the classroom. They noted that the new students were reaching out and making friends at their new schools. Teachers also reported that general education students were volunteering to pair up with their transitioned peers in the classrooms in order to help them adjust to their new schools. These connections with general education students, and the greater awareness of disabilities and inaccessibility by teachers, may signal the beginnings of the kind of change that inclusion scholars describe when they lay out a vision for inclusive societies.

### **Inclusion and Belonging**

Definitions of inclusion have described it as an effort to create the conditions in which all students can feel a sense of belonging in their school community (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Fisher & Frey, 2003; McCleskey and Waldron, 2000; Solomon, Schaps, Watson & Battistich, 1993; Stainback & Stainback, 2000; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin & Williams, 2000). The results of this study suggest that the strong focus on belonging to a school

community in the school inclusion literature is warranted. The students' sense of belonging in their schools emerged in the qualitative responses of students directly (e.g. "sometimes I feel like I don't belong here", "this school feels like home") and indirectly as a strong focus on having friends, "getting along" and other social issues. Although school belonging was measured directly in this study with a quantitative scale, the qualitative items did not ask directly about whether students' felt that they belonged. Additionally, the open-ended qualitative items were among the first items on the surveys for both students and teachers and were answered before students and teachers completed the school belonging scales. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the qualitative results were not influenced by questions on the school belonging scale. Despite this lack of priming, qualitative data focused strongly on the social issues of acceptance and fitting in with others in the new school.

The qualitative data showed that the belonging of students in their new schools was also an issue of importance to teachers, who frequently reported on the social needs and accomplishments of the students. Teachers often focused on whether or not the student was "fitting in" to the class, a group of friends, or in the overall school. The quantitative data also show how important school belonging is to inclusion, particularly when it was compared to the qualitative data in the third phase of the analysis. There appears to be a relationship between the qualitative and quantitative data on school belonging in that student and teacher reported problems are associated with lower school belonging. Also, in both the qualitative and quantitative data school belonging was a point of

agreement between students and teachers, showing its salience across data types and groups. This suggests that from both the student and teacher perspectives, whether they were writing out descriptions of their experiences following the transition or answering quantitative scales, the issue of belonging to the school community was very important and one which teachers were “tuned in to” for their students.

Prior research has demonstrated that school transitions of the type in this study can jeopardize a student’s sense of belonging (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Long, MacBlain & MacBlain, 2007; Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). The results of this study confirm that students do experience problems following a transition and also show that the problems may negatively affect school belonging. This finding was particularly evident in the data comparison phase of the analysis. When examining the qualitative data more closely, it appears that the social problems that students face following a transition are a primary factor in diminished school belonging. Students explained that the transition created not only social opportunities (“I get to make new friends”) as the literature on inclusion would suggest (Ou & Reynolds, 2008), but also social problems (“kids make fun of you”) as the critiques of inclusion would suggest (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995). Students who complained of social exclusion and bullying also described issues of belonging more directly. For example, a student who felt he was not liked by his teachers or peers wrote that “sometimes I feel I don’t belong in this school.” These findings confirm the findings of prior research on school transitions that show that students’ sense of school belonging can be

adversely affected by the move to a new school or classroom (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Long, MacBlain & MacBlain, 2007; Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Temple & Reynolds, 1999).

An interesting finding of this study is that school belonging for the recently transitioned group of students in this study was higher than the normed average (Goodenow, 1993). It is worthwhile to speculate about the cause of this finding. Is there something special about this group that results in such a high level of school belonging? For example, one characteristic that all students shared was their attendance at the school that closed, and it could be the case that students at this school had higher school belonging than average. However, even if students began the transition with high school belonging, the literature on transitions suggests that the transition from their shared school would have a deleterious effect on school belonging that may diminish this shared strength. Unfortunately, longitudinal data is not available for this sample to test this possibility. It is also possible that there were efforts from school staff at the various schools in the study to welcome new students, and that these efforts were especially effective, resulting in notable levels of school belonging despite the transition. Additionally, it could be the case that students with disabilities have higher average school belonging than non-disabled students. However, this possibility is very unlikely, as it would run counter to findings in the literature on the effects of marginalization and the literature on the effects of transitions on school belonging. Given the paucity of longitudinal research on school belonging for all students and the lack of quantitative research on school belonging among

students with disabilities, it would be useful for future research to measure this construct quantitatively over time. With longitudinal quantitative data, further comparisons can be made and some of the questions raised by this finding can be addressed.

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

A key finding of this study is the strong role that teachers have in supporting students following the transition. Teachers and students reported that teachers reached out to help when students felt isolated and alone, and when teachers did not reach out students noted this as a significant problem with the move to their new school. While it is important for teachers to focus on curricula and academic concerns, it is no less important that teachers recognize the vital social functions they play in the lives of their students, particularly for those students who are most vulnerable and marginalized. The results of this study confirm the findings of studies like the one conducted by Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder (2004), who found that intergenerational bonding between students without disabilities and teachers leads to better social and academic outcomes. The same study also linked overall school climate to the strength of student-teacher relationships. Research has repeatedly linked important indicators of student achievement with social constructs like school belonging (Anderman, 2002; McMahon et al, 2008). This study adds to a growing body of research showing that student-teacher relationships are critical for school belonging (Anderman, 2002; Anderman, 2003; Freeman, Anderman & Henson, 2007). This study supports other research that suggests that students may do better emotionally,



socially and academically if teachers are supportive and caring (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Positive student-teacher relationships can indeed promote school belonging, but the results of this study also show that negative student-teacher relationships may have a negative effect on students' sense of belonging. Students who reported that their teachers criticized or disapproved of them, had arguments or fights with them, got on their nerves, got angry or expected too much from them reported lower school belonging than other students. What makes this finding in the data particularly troublesome is that the teachers who reported on the students were not significantly aware when students perceived their relationships with teachers as negative or stressful. Even when examining the negative interaction subscale by item, it was found that no items on the teacher or student scales were related, suggesting a complete lack of agreement from the two perspectives. The quantitative results show that teachers were able to accurately identify if a student did *or did not* feel belonging, suggesting that teachers are able to perceive that some students may not feel that they belong. However, the teachers may not be aware of their, or other school staff's, role in the student's lack of belonging. While it was found that teachers' ratings of student belonging were generally accurate when compared to students' ratings of their own belonging, teacher responses on items related to teacher-student relationships were very different from student perspectives. Specifically, teachers were in agreement with students on the frequency of positive student-teacher interactions, but teachers and students were in disagreement about whether student research

participants were respected as much as other students and whether teachers and other adults at the school really understood them. The quantitative results show that the means for item two of the school belonging survey are not correlated between student and teacher responses, suggesting that students and teachers had different perspectives about whether teachers were interested in the student. Students felt teachers were less interested in them than the teachers themselves indicated, and when students reported having problems with their teachers, their school belonging was lower than the overall sample mean. These findings support research by Nichols (2008) that suggest students connect feelings of belonging to how supportive and caring their relationships are with teachers in their classes. This study adds to literature emphasizing the need for positive student-teacher relationships and links together the inclusion and school belonging literature on this topic.

### **Social Support and Peer Relationships**

Seminal education articles that influenced the inclusion movement posited that the social aspects of inclusion were of supreme importance. The Deno (1970) article argued that “social capital,” essentially the benefits that come with being given equal social opportunities and equitable socialization with peers, is critical for overall student success. Therefore, education that is socially segregated sets up students with disabilities for failure. Dunn (1968) made a legal argument tied to the social segregation inherent in “special” education, arguing that such a system for students with disabilities was unnecessary and amounted to the same kind of segregation rejected by the Supreme Court in 1954 *Brown v. Board*. Arguments

against inclusion have also been social in nature. One argument proposes that inclusion isolates students more than special education. Students in general education classrooms stigmatize and exclude students with disabilities because of their differences. Some research supports this assertion. In a study of an inclusive classroom, Taylor, Asher and Williams (1987) found that students with disabilities were viewed as shy, avoidant outsiders in the class. Additionally a qualitative study of the experiences of seven teenage students with disabilities found that school belonging was indeed limited by peer exclusion (Doubt & McCall, 2003). As inclusion has grown in the United States the debate for and against inclusion has stressed the importance of socialization with peers.

The findings of this study however, provide a more complex picture of the social lives of students with disabilities transitioning to inclusion than the arguments for or against would lead one to believe. Students reported mixed social experiences with peers, indicating that in some instances they were rejected and teased by peers in their new schools, but that they were also welcomed and accepted. Students who complained of teasing explained that the other students laughed when they spoke, or that the other students thought that they were “better than” the transitioned students. Students also complained of the loss of friends following the transition into their new school, and in some instances complained that it was hard to make new friends. Teachers affirmed this perspective of the students, reporting that some students had few friends and were lonely. However, far more students reported that they had made friends at their new school, and were glad to be “meeting new people.” Indeed, the number of positive social

experiences qualitatively reported by students was much more than the number of negative experiences (Figure 2). Students stressed that having the opportunities of their new more inclusive schools broadened their “horizons” and supported them in trying new things. Students and teachers described instances in which students joined clubs and teams, changed from shy to outgoing following the transition and were supported by other students in the class. In many instances students reported that one of the best things about their move to the new school was “making new friends.” It appears that while there are good reasons to be concerned about peer rejection following a transition to more inclusive environments, there are also many reasons to be hopeful. The students in this sample experienced a range of reactions from their peers, but in most cases the reactions were positive and accepting.

### **Transition Problems: Systemic and Individual Obstacles**

The literature on school transitions shows that they can be challenging for students. In particular, studies have shown that transitions can negatively impact students’ sense of belonging (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Long, MacBlain & MacBlain, 2007; Temple & Reynolds, 1999), and academic achievement (Ou & Reynolds, 2008). Also, in a study of student transitions in early education, Lynch (2009) found that students who transition from other schools can represent a special challenge for teachers, who must help students adjust to new social and academic norms. However, there are few studies to our knowledge that examine transitions from the perspective of students with disabilities moving to more inclusive settings. Therefore, the literature on the transition problems with this

group is sparse, and little is known about the problems that students and teachers face. One study examined barriers to inclusion perceived by students with disabilities and their parents, but not in the context of a transition to inclusion (Pivik, McComas & LaFlamme, 2002). The study concluded that barriers to inclusion fell into four categories: physical environment, intentional (teasing and bullying), unintentional (lack of understanding of disabilities) and physical limitations (Pivik, McComas & LaFlamme, 2002). Interestingly, the barriers found in the Pivik et al (2002) study line up well with the barriers found in this study. Students in this study described being bullied and teased, having difficulty using their new school facilities because of accessibility problems, and not being understood because of disabilities. These matching themes between the Pivik et al (2002) study and the present study show that though the transition may present problems, these problems may be part of inclusive education more generally. According to the qualitative reports from teachers and students in this study, the transition problems that came up most frequently had to do with overall accessibility in the school building, making academic adjustments and student social adjustment (Figures 3 and 4).

### **Accessibility**

Teachers and students complained that some school buildings were not adequately prepared to accept the influx of students with disabilities following the transition. Some schools were inaccessible in that the elevators did not work, hallways were too narrow, classrooms were too small or on floors that students could not access. Also, doorways were not wide enough, transportation was not

appropriate, ramps were not available and needed equipment or resources had not yet arrived. For example, one teacher wrote that her student “is not finding resources to help him access the curriculum and receive added assistance.”

Another teacher explained, “there is only one special ed teacher and one case manager. He wasn’t getting the help that he needed.” These findings echo those in the Pivik et al (2002) study, which showed that students had accessibility problems with “...doors, passageways, elevators, washrooms, stairs and ramps” (p. 101). This finding is particularly concerning because accessibility is a very basic need that is not only vital for students to be included, but is mandated by law (viz. the Americans with Disabilities Act). Further, if students are unable to access the building easily, it is unlikely that they will feel as though they are welcomed in their new schools, jeopardizing the sense of belonging to a school community that is a key goal of inclusion efforts.

### **Academic Issues and Transition Planning**

Transition planning efforts sometimes fell short, and there were instances where this affected student adjustment. Students complained that in the move to a new school they had academic credits that did not transfer and classes they had to retake. Teachers complained that student records arrived late and therefore students were not able to take classes that they wanted because of disorganization in the transition. For example, a teacher wrote of a student who could not register for appropriate classes because his academic information arrived late in the transition, “after four weeks, schedule was changed and of course all of the interesting classes were full!” Further, students at times appeared to be

unprepared to meet the academic expectations set by their new teachers, and this apparent lack of preparation created conflict between students and teachers.

Students complained that their work was “too hard” and “the worst”, while teachers complained that students “did not work” or only did “poor work.”

Students also complained that they were getting low grades for the first time, and some teachers reported that their transferred students were failing. The academic issues following the transition confirm earlier studies of school transitions that showed that school transitions are a risk factor affecting academic achievement (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Ou & Reynolds, 2008).

While it is possible that there may have been some students who were not working up to their potential at their old school and continued this pattern at their new school, there are some data to support the view that the academic expectations were in fact different. Many students reported that the new teachers “expect more from you” and that after moving to the new school the work became “more challenging.” No students reported that the work became easier following the transition. The different expectations may have created an obstacle for the transitioned students. This finding would be consistent with the findings of Lynch (2009) who found that schools that have differing interpretations of what constitutes acceptable academic work create barriers for transitioning students. Additionally, these different expectations create difficulties for teachers, who must work to help transitioning student adjust to the new school. The academic issues that the students reported in this study suggest that more could have been

done to prepare students before the transition by gradually raising expectations and increasing academic work.

### **Social Adjustment**

In terms of social adjustment, students and teachers described both instances in which students were unable to “fit in” or “make new friends” following the move to the new school, and instances in which they were alienated and lonely. Students complained primarily that they missed their old friends and teachers, that they found it difficult to make new friends, that their peers bullied or teased them, and of adjustment difficulties to a new social milieu. For example, one student complained that she was upset that she would not graduate with the class with which she started high school. Other students described having difficulty adjusting to schools because they were “too big” or had “too many students.” Others felt inhibited and shy in their new schools, and still others felt rejected and unwelcome by their new peers. Teachers complained that because of a lack of planning in the transition, they were unable to develop social events that could have eased the students into their new schools. Nonetheless, teachers strived to help students cope with the social changes and made personal efforts to reach out to students when needed.

The social problems following the transition fit well into the school inclusion and belonging literature (Anderman, 2000; Fisher & Frey, 2003; Stainback & Stainback, 2000) which posits that social support is critical for both, and lack of social support is an obstacle. However, most transition studies focus on the academic outcomes, and few take into account the social consequences for



students. The findings of this study show that transitions of the sort experienced by students in this sample can create myriad social problems that some students find it difficult to solve on their own.

### **Attempts to Address Transition Problems**

Attempts to address these problems came from a variety of sources, which, taken together,, engaged many dimensions of their schools' ecology. Teachers described contacting district offices to repair elevators or improve transportation, working with school administrators to adjust student schedules so that they have more time to move between classes, referring students to social workers or counselors, and contacting the student's family. One teacher's report of the efforts made illustrates the many modifications that were done to help students in the transition, "personal aide, extra time to go to and from classes, time to make up work in resource or at home. Amount of work cut, acceptance of verbal responses over written, acceptance of written work length cut." Both students and teachers described students who made efforts to make friends over time and found a place for themselves in their new school. Teachers often reported that students managed to "fit in" or make friends with time and effort. Students reported a similar process of being shy or scared when arriving at their new schools, but eventually "finding a place" in their new social environment. Additionally, the findings of this study show that collaboration among teachers, school staff, and district offices was crucial to solving many of the problems that came up following the transition. Teachers described alerting school counselors and nurses to issues of behavioral problems and ill health. They also described

reaching out to parents, bus drivers, other teachers and contacting school system officials to seek solutions for students' problems. The data on problem-solving show that inclusion is ecological and the teachers report that they were usually the ones who navigated this complex system on behalf of students to look for solutions at multiple levels within the system.

### **Critiques of School Inclusion and the Current Findings**

The transition in this study reflects a national shift in policy that students with disabilities should be included in general education schools and classes whenever possible. While full school inclusion, placing students of all needs in general education classrooms for the entire school day, is far from realized in most schools, there is an ongoing and incremental shift toward greater inclusion (Brusling & Pepin, 2003; Villa, Kluth & Thousand, 2001). The incremental nature of this shift was reflected in the schools in this study. Teachers and students reported a mix of inclusion experiences. For the students in this study, who were coming from a school that primarily served students with disabilities, this shift to a mixed but generally more inclusive setting was an opportunity to, as one student explained, "widen my horizons." This insight is consistent with literature on inclusion that describes it as an empowering alternative to special education in separate classes and separate schools (Charlton, 1998) and an opportunity for all students to belong (Stainback & Stainback, 2000). However, the opportunities presented by the transition were also fraught with problems, and it is worthwhile to examine these difficulties further to see if they match up with critiques of school inclusion. Also, through understanding these problems from both the

student and teacher perspectives, it may be possible to plan for the obstacles students and teachers will face in future transitions.

The literature on school inclusion illustrates that there is debate about how best to carry it out and even whether it should be carried out at all. Most researchers and education specialists believe that school inclusion will give students with disabilities more social and academic opportunities than special education. However, some researchers have pointed out that there are difficulties and downsides to school inclusion that may make it a better idea than reality. For example, Morse (1995) argued that students with disabilities should continue to receive separate classes, because special education classes provide a special environment with highly skilled professionals who have the training to work appropriately with students who have disabilities. Morse's concern is that students with disabilities who are moved into general education classes lose the advantages of specialized instruction and skilled teachers. However, the results of this study show that in actuality the transition to inclusion is more complicated than the simple loss or gain of services and opportunities. Some students did indeed report that they felt that their teachers did not understand them and that their new schools did not feel welcoming to them because of their disabilities. Many students also reported that their workload was higher than it had been before the transition and some believed that too much was expected of them. However, most students reported that they felt belonging in their new schools and many students felt that their new teachers were setting high, but appropriate, expectations. Students explained that though expectations were generally higher in general

education classes, they were pushed to excel by their new teachers and that this was inspiring, “The teachers here are a whole lot different. They don’t try to give you a free ride just because you are in a chair. They expect you to do what you are capable of doing.” Many students also described feeling supported and understood in their new inclusive settings. In fact, students reported far more positive than negative experiences socially and academically, and the quantitative and qualitative data suggests that students were generally able to get their needs met in their new settings, even when there were problems. Indeed, students’ in the transition reported higher school belonging than is typical (Goodenow, 1993). Overall, Morse’s (1995) argument received modest support at most from the findings of this study. While in some cases there were adjustment problems following the transition for some students, in most cases students thrived in their new inclusive settings.

In the literature on school inclusion another debate has been taking place over whether general education teachers have the training to adequately meet the needs of students with disabilities. Coates (1989) found that teachers themselves were uncertain whether they could meet the needs of students with disabilities. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found that two thirds of teachers support the concept of inclusion, but only one third felt that they had sufficient training necessary to carry it out. However, no teachers in this study reported that they felt unable or unqualified to work with students with disabilities during the transition, or that their skills were not enough to meet students’ needs. Indeed, one teacher who described a challenge moving a student in and out of his wheelchair

explained, “Staff in the school have volunteered to transfer him and we had training on proper techniques last week.” The weight of the evidence in this study does not support the findings of prior research suggesting that teachers feel unable to meet the needs of students with disabilities. There are a number of possible reasons for this discrepancy in the results and past research. The first possible reason is that the teachers in this study were part of a district-wide effort, and received trainings and information as part of the overall transition. This potential explanation is backed by the results of a study by Jobe, Rust, and Brissie (2004) who found that favorable views of inclusion by general education teachers were positively correlated with the amount of training teachers had in the actual implementation of inclusion. A second possible explanation for the discrepancy may be that the teachers in this study had already faced and solved problems that came up during the transition, and this may have afforded them greater confidence. For this reason, they may not have conveyed that they had difficulties meeting student needs. Finally, teachers in this study may be different from teachers in past studies by virtue of the time that has passed and the cultural changes in education. The reviews that focus on teachers (Coates, 1989; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) are well over 10 years old and may reflect a period different from the one in which teachers find themselves today. After all, inclusion has been called the “silent revolution” (Fleisher & Zames, 2001) for its powerful impact on the landscape of education. Teachers in this sample may be more familiar, and more confident, about school inclusion.

Hallahan and Kauffman (1995b) have argued that collaboration between general education teachers and other staff, particularly special education teachers, is unrealistic. However this assertion is not supported by the findings of this study. In the qualitative data teachers described a great deal of collaboration among staff, particularly in answering the question “How were these issues addressed?” In answering this question teachers pointed out that to address issues many people in and out of the school collaborated, and that aides, nurses, bus drivers, social workers, counselors, administrators and other teachers were instrumental in helping to solve problems. Teachers also enlisted students’ peers in problem solving tasks, by pairing the transitioned students with classmates to help them adjust academically and socially. These qualitative findings illustrate that despite fears that teachers and others in the school would be unable to cooperate to meet the needs of students with disabilities, teachers were indeed prepared and able to enlist the help of others in working out transition problems. Further, because most reports of problem solving were positive and showed a resolution to the issues, the data suggest that schools in this study may have indeed come together to form supportive communities. It may be the case that teachers in this study found that they could solve the problems that came up during the transition to inclusion as they gained experience and collaborated.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study had several strengths and limitations worth noting. The study benefited from a multiple perspective and multiple method approach. The use of multiple perspectives is an approach to research that has been of interest in

community psychology and education. When a phenomenon of interest is essentially ecological, in that it affects a wide variety of people with different roles in a multi-level system or setting, then a full understanding the phenomenon requires understanding it from a diversity of perspectives (Trickett, 2009). In this study school inclusion affected many people in the schools and in the community, and the two groups most directly affected by the transition to school inclusion were students with disabilities and their new teachers. To best understand the opportunities and difficulties that arose in the transition, it was important to understand both students and teachers experience of the transition. This multiple perspective approach allowed a richer understanding of the changes that students and teachers were grappling with and provided a novel way of comparing and contrasting the information collected. Students and teachers had points of agreement and disagreement that showed the complexity of the changes taking place in the school and in the lives of the students. Additionally, the multi-method approach was a strength in this study. School inclusion researchers have recommended using multiple methods to better understand how those affected by school inclusion make sense of the changes they are experiencing. Community psychologists have also promoted multiple method approaches for their sensitivity to context and ability to best approximate the “truth” of a situation (Tebes, 2005). In this study, it was possible to get a direct look at key constructs for inclusion by quantitatively measuring school belonging, social support and social stress, while also providing room for participants to describe the problems and opportunities of the transition as they themselves experienced them using open-ended survey

questions. This approach allowed for the confirmation of the key constructs in that participants focused on them in their qualitative reports, but it also brought forth new understandings of the experience of a transition, and in particular the types of obstacles that both students and teachers encounter.

While this study has important strengths, there are also limitations worth noting. A lack of longitudinal data is an important limitation of this study. A longitudinal approach would be useful in that it would help sort out the pre and post effects of the transition. It also would allow us to view links between teacher-student relationships and school belonging over time. With such information a more concrete cause and effect arguments could be made for example, concerning the relation of teacher support and school belonging. Additionally, this study would have benefited from academic data, which has been found in prior research to be linked with both school belonging and student-teacher relationships. This study would also have benefited from parent perspectives of the transition, allowing a broader community-based view of the inclusion phenomenon. It would also be worthwhile to collect general education student perspectives. The literature on school inclusion suggests that school inclusion benefits all students, and it would be useful to know how other students in the transition were affected by the change to greater inclusion. Another limitation of this study was that while the qualitative data did enhance the understanding of the transition, the data was limited by the open-ended written item format. It would also be useful to collect qualitative data from students in an in-depth interview format in future research.

### **Implications for Theory and Research**



This study has implications for the fields of community psychology, disability studies and education in terms of theory and research. This study broadens the populations studied and the constructs of interest in community psychology. School inclusion is a sweeping national change in education that affects some of the most marginalized and understudied populations in public schools. It is also a strongly ecological phenomenon, which touches on individual, organizational, community and national levels of analysis. Therefore, an understanding of inclusion requires an ecological investigation that goes beyond the student to examine relationships (such as teacher-student relationships) and macro-level phenomena (such as district-wide policy changes and school transitions). Community psychologists have a history of school-based research, interest in giving voice to marginalized populations, and examining phenomena ecologically. Researchers in community psychology, therefore, have much to add to the understanding of school inclusion, and its effects on students, teachers, schools and communities. We encourage community psychologists to focus more on this marginalized population and this important national movement in education.

One of the important implications of this study for theory and research relates to the methodology used. While community psychologists have been advocates of using qualitative approaches to understand phenomena, the field has yet to embrace mixed- method approaches in practice, even though leaders in the field have recommended them (Tebes, 2009). Mixed-method approaches offer a number of benefits that are of particular interest to community psychologists, in

that they allow for greater generalization across studies while also being sensitive to situation. Mixed-method studies also honor the voices of participants and give them the opportunity to tell their own version of events, rather than only responding to scales chosen by the researcher. The approach used in this study provided a way to examine the importance of constructs of interest to researchers and confirm that they were indeed of interest to those affected by school inclusion and transitions as well. The findings that this approach yields offer support for prior research on school belonging in school inclusion. Community psychologists and education researchers would benefit from adopting a mixed-method approach when investigating complex ecological phenomena like school inclusion.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study have implications for educational practices. First, and perhaps most important, because the problems of the inclusion and transition process were found to be ecological in nature, it is critical that planning for future transitions be ecological as well. The transition to inclusion presents obstacles that require system-level solutions (transportation and accessibility issues), others that require school-level solutions (accessibility and school climate issues), and still others that require modifications at the level of the classroom (academics and social issues). Planning for transitions should include multi-leveled interventions with efforts that take place not just in the classroom where the student is placed, but within the school environment and in the overall system. Planning may require policy changes that emphasize the importance of inclusion in an entire district rather than in a single school. Within the schools in which the

students are placed, teachers and all other school staff may need to participate in trainings on school inclusion that set a tone for social support and school belonging. Additionally, students themselves may be prepared for the transition with pre and post visits to academic advisors and counselors, where they can anticipate and plan for any problems that may arise in the transition.

At the level of individual students, the findings of this study show that when students transition into a new school, particularly when they move to more inclusive environments, they encounter a set of obstacles that are salient to both students and teachers. Following the transition students had difficulty adjusting socially and felt a significant loss of their friends and teachers at their previous school. At times they had difficulty making new friends and felt overwhelmed if their new school was bigger or had a larger student body. A significant number of students described being bullied or teased by peers in their new schools as well. Planning for future transitions should account for this difficulty in social adjustment. Attention would usefully be invested in considering the following for incoming students: to be paired with peers, to receive extra one-on-one adult attention, and to have appointments with school counselors to prevent adjustment problems. Additionally, receiving schools may help prevent social problems by adopting anti-bullying campaigns in the schools ahead of the transition, and developing education programs to increase sensitivity to disabilities among general education students. Teachers in this study made many of the solutions recommended here happen for some students on an as-needed basis. However, it would be beneficial to students and to the teachers who work with them to make

these solutions available and easy to access at the outset of a transition, to alert teachers to the kinds of problems students may experience in the upcoming transition and what resources are available. Students also ran into academic problems that could be anticipated and diminished or prevented. Some of the new schools appeared to have different expectations, and some students had difficulty adjusting academically. While many students complained that it was hard to meet expectations, students also appreciated the extra challenge when expectations were higher. It may be beneficial in future transitions to provide students with a brief good-faith grace period as they adjust to the new academic expectations. For students who have difficulty adjusting, having extra resources in place to aid them in catching up, such as tutoring and remedial classes, may be needed. In some cases teachers took extra time out of their own schedules (in one case out of the teacher's lunch break) to tutor the students who had difficulty adjusting academically. It would be easier for teachers and students to anticipate such problems and put in place a plan to make tutors and other resources available to students as needed following a transition.

At the ecological levels beyond the individual student, planning for transitions to inclusion may benefit from anticipating the need to coordinate resources and information across systems that do not regularly interact. For example, teachers in this study complained that student records did not arrive promptly from the school that students transitioned from, and that this negatively affected the student in their choice of classes. It would be helpful for administrators in future transitions to ensure that all schools involved begin

planning for the transition as early as possible so that appropriate academic planning can occur. Accessibility was another problem that both students and teachers discussed and which occurs at a level beyond the individual student. Both groups pointed to specific issues that could be anticipated and addressed prior to students arriving. Out of order elevators, narrow halls and doors, overcrowded hallways, a lack of wheelchair ramps, and a lack of accessible technology were some of the complaints that students and teachers had in this transition. It is recommended that administrators planning future transitions review building accessibility and make repairs prior to student arrival. A useful solution for overcrowding that teachers described was to allow students with disabilities to leave class early so that they could get through the halls easily during passing periods. Another issue at an ecological level beyond the individual is that in some instances students complained of a school climate that was unwelcoming to students with disabilities. Students described feeling misunderstood by students and teachers. Teachers should be encouraged to set the tone for acceptance and understanding, and should receive support for learning as much about inclusion as they can.

This study also points to the critical importance that teacher-student relationships play in the well-being of students with disabilities in transition. Students often described their relationships with their new teachers as a critical aspect of the transition. In cases where the relationships were positive, students appeared to make the adjustment to their new school and made friends. Overall, the relationship that students had with their new teachers appeared to be a key

aspect of their adjustment. Administrators in education overseeing school transitions for students with disabilities would do well to emphasize the critical need for teachers to reach out to incoming students and develop supportive relationships with them. Additionally, teachers who notice that students do not seem to fit in or have a sense of belonging in their classrooms or in the school in general may address the problem by focusing on their own relationship to the student. Being mindful of negative interactions, and cultivating more empathic and caring interactions with students is likely to be one of teachers' most effective tools in helping their students. While poor student-teacher relationships are certainly not the only reason why students feel less belonging, supportive relationships can mitigate some negative effects and protect a student's sense of belonging.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study suggest reasons for hope and caution when moving students with disabilities into inclusive settings. Transitions are stressful events for students, due to losses in familiar routines, friends and teachers, and this can complicate student belonging in their new school communities. Students and teachers reported similar problems following the transition, adding weight to the findings and suggesting that these problems may be common following a transition of the type in this study. The results of this study show that school environments that foster opportunities for belonging and positive social relationships, particularly with teachers, can mitigate the negative effects of the problems that come up during a school transition. Specifically, in order to protect

and foster school belonging, students need school environments that are accessible, school climates that are positive and accepting, and teachers and peers who they feel respect and understand them. Students also need teachers to actively reach out and reassure them during the stressful periods of the transition, and actively problem-solve issues with them, as was done in this study. It is hoped that the results of this study add to our understanding of school inclusion and school transitions, and provide a map for teachers and administrators in navigating the obstacles in such a transition.

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## APPENDIX A: THE TEACHER SURVEY ON INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

*The Office of Specialized Services and DePaul University are interested in your perspective on how students with disabilities are doing in the transition to a different school. Please complete one of these surveys on each student from [SCHOOL NAME DELETED]. If you are unable to answer any of the questions due to severe and profound disabilities, please skip those questions. Itinerant teachers will be returning completed surveys to the Office of Specialized Services.*

1. Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 2. School: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Student Disability/ies: \_\_\_\_\_

4a. Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 4b. Your Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

5. How long have you been working with this student? \_\_\_\_\_ months, \_\_\_\_\_ years

6. How often do you have contact with the student? (Circle your response)

Never              Monthly              Weekly              Almost daily              Daily

7. What issues have come up for this student during the transition from [SCHOOL NAME DELETED] to the current school?

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8. How have these issues been addressed?

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9. What is the current status on these issues?

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10. What positive things have you noticed regarding this student during the transition from [SCHOOL NAME DELETED]?

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*Please circle the response choice that best represents your perspective on the student.*

1. This student feels like a real part of this school.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all True		Somewhat True		Completely True

2. Most teachers at this school are interested in this student.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all True		Somewhat True		Completely True

3. This student is included in lots of activities at this school.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all True		Somewhat True		Completely True

3. This student is treated with as much respect as other students.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all True		Somewhat True		Completely True

5. This student has good friends here at school.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all True		Somewhat True		Completely True

**How often (please circle your response):**

1. Does this student have arguments or fights with any students at school?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Fairly Often
	Often		

2. Does this student have argument or fights with any teachers, coaches, or counselors?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Fairly Often
	Often		

3. Do students at school make fun of, criticize, or disapprove of this student?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Fairly Often
	Often		

4. Are any teachers, coaches or counselors critical or disapproving of this student?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Fairly Often
	Often		

5. Is there too much pressure to compete with other students at school?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Fairly Often
	Often		

6. Do any teachers, coaches, or counselors expect too much of this student or give her/him too much homework?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Fairly Often
	Often		

7. Does this student have fun, laugh, or joke with any of the teachers, coaches, or counselors?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Fairly Often
	Often		

8. Do any of the teachers, coaches or counselors really understand how this student feels about things?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Fairly Often
	Often		



**APPENDIX B: STUDENT OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS**

1. Please describe the **2 best** things about your move from SCHOOL NAME DELETED to your new school?

A) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

B) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Please describe the **2 worst** things about your move from SCHOOL NAME DELETED to your new school?

A) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

B) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What things would you like to have **changed** at your new school?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**APPENDIX C: SENSE OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP SURVEY**

**(STUDENT VERSION)**

**D. PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT SHOWS HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL.**

1. I feel like a real part of my school.

1	2	3	4
5			
Not at all True			Completely
True			

2. People here notice when I'm good at something.

1	2	3	4
5			
Not at all True			Completely
True			

3. It is hard for people like me to be accepted here.

1	2	3	4
5			
Not at all True			Completely
True			

4. Other students in this school take my opinions seriously (listen to me when I give my opinion).

1	2	3	4
5			
Not at all True			Completely
True			

5. Most teachers at my school are interested in me.

1	2	3	4
5			
Not at all True			Completely
True			

6. Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong here.

1	2	3	4
5			
Not at all True			Completely
True			

7. There's at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem.

1	2	3	4
5			
Not at all True			Completely
True			



8. People at this school are friendly to me.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

9. Teachers here are not interested in people like me.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

10. I am included in lots of activities at my school.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

11. I am treated with as much respect as other students.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

12. I feel very different from most other students here.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

13. I can really be myself at this school.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

14. The teachers here respect me.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

15. People here know I can do good work.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

16. I wish I were in a different school.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

17. I feel proud of belonging to my school.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

18. Other students here like me the way I am.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

19. I have good friends here at school.

1	2	3	4	
5				
Not at all True				Completely
True				

**APPENDIX D: SCHOOL STRESSORS AND RESOURCES****SURVEY (STUDENT VERSION)**

**Here are some questions about other students at school (Please circle your response).**

**How often:**

9. Do you have argument or fights with any students at school?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

10. Do any of the students at school make fun of you, criticize you or disapprove of you?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

11. Do any students at school get on your nerves?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

12. Do any students at school get angry or lose their temper with you?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

13. Do any students at school expect too much of you?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

14. Is there too much pressure to compete with other students at school?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

**Here are some questions about your teachers, coaches, and counselors.**

**How often:**

15. Do you have arguments or fights with any of them?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

16. Do any of them make fun of you, criticize you or disapprove of you?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

17. Do any of them get on your nerves?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

18. Do any of them get angry or lose their temper with you?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

19. Do any of them expect too much of you or give you too much homework?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

20. Can you count on any of them to help you when you need it?

Never          Rarely          Sometimes          Fairly Often  
Often

21. Do any of them cheer you up when you are sad or worried?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Fairly Often
Often			

22. Do you have fun, laugh, or joke with any of them?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Fairly Often
Often			

23. Do any of them really understand how you feel about things?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Fairly Often
Often			

24. Do any of them respect your opinion?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Fairly Often
Often			

**APPENDIX E: STUDENT DATA CODEBOOK**

Student Data Codebook 3/7/08

**People/Social:** the student describes people or social interactions.

- New people – the student refers to meeting/being with new people without specifying whether they are peers, teachers or staff

**Peers:** The student describes positive or negative experiences with peers in their new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED

- New students – The student describes experiences with new students
- Friends – The student describes friendships or a lack of friendships (ex. Missing friends, Making friends, New friends, No friends)
- Peers negative – The student describes negative students with peers (ex. Mean kids, Peers uncomfortable with disability, Teasing)
- Peers positive – The student describes positive experiences with peers (ex. Nice students)

**Teachers:** The student describes positive or negative experiences with teachers at their new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED

- Miss old teachers – the student describes missing the teachers he/she had at SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- New teachers – the student describes having new teachers
- Teachers Pos. – the student describes having positive experiences with teachers
- Teachers Neg. – the student describes having negative experiences with teachers. Includes teachers not understanding disabilities.

**Staff:** The student describes negative or positive experiences with school staff other than teachers (ex. Security, Aide, Nurse)

- Staff positive – The student describes positive experiences with school staff (ex. Aide supportive)
- Staff negative – The student describes negative experiences with school staff (ex. Mean security guard)

**Activities:** The student indicates that he/she is interested in or experiencing activities at their new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED (ex. Homecoming, parties, etc.)

- Extracurricular – The student indicates that he/she is interested in or experiencing extracurricular activities. Must use the word “extracurricular.”
- Clubs/teams – The student indicates that he/she is interested in or is involved in school clubs or teams at her/his new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED

- Field trips – The student indicates that he/she is interested in or has been taking field trips at her/his new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED

**Academics** – the student refers to academics or “work” at their new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED

- Learning/Classes Positive – a favorable description of learning or classes (ex. “more learning”)
- Learning/Classes Negative – an unfavorable description of learning or classes (ex. “Not learning”)
- Grades Negative – student refers to their own grades being bad, declining or worsening (ex. “Bad grades”)
- Grades Positive – student refers to their own grades as good or improving (ex. “Grades improving”)
- Curriculum/Requirements – student describes curriculum, requirements or refers to a specific subject (ex. “New subjects”, “Different requirements”)
- Not enough time – Student describes not having enough time to complete work
- More challenging – Student describes new school as more challenging. May be positive or negative.
- Graduation issues – the student describes concerns about graduation. Must use the word “graduate” or “graduation”

**New School** – the student refers to the school that they transitioned into after leaving SCHOOL NAME DELETED

- New school pos.— Student indicates that he/she likes school, is having a positive experience at their new school, or indicates that general conditions are good (ex. “it’s fine”, “everything’s all right”, “it’s good”). Boundary conditions: if the student answers in the negative (ex. “nothing”, “no”, “don’t know”) use the code *Nothing*. Also, if the student points out specific characteristics of the school environment (i.e. “clean”, “fun”) use *School Climate*.
- New school neg. – Student indicates that he/she does not like school.
- No difference – Student indicates that they see no difference between SCHOOL NAME DELETED and their new school.
- Lot to offer – Student describes their new school as having many things that they like or are interested in.
- Lunch – the student describes the lunches or lunchroom at the new school.

**New School Climate** – the student describes aspects of the school environment, particularly what the environment feels like to the student.

- School Climate Positive – student favorably describes the environment of the new school (ex. “Excitement”, “Fun”, “Like home”, “Clean”)
- School Climate Negative – student unfavorably describes the environment of the new school (ex. “Too big”, “No belonging”, “Dirty”)
- Overcrowded – Student describes his/her new school as overcrowded (ex. “too many kids”, “would like fewer people”)
- Bigger population – Student describes his/her school new school as having a bigger population than SCHOOL NAME DELETED . Not expressed negatively (if so, use “overcrowded”)
- Adapting – The student describes adapting or adjusting to their new school.
- Multicultural – The student describes their new school as multicultural or diverse. Or as needing to be more multicultural or diverse. (ex. “need more hispanics” or “need more students with disabilities”)
- New Opportunities – the student indicates that their new school has new opportunities.
- Inclusion – student describes being included with general education students.
- Different – the student indicates that their new school is different from SCHOOL NAME DELETED . Only use if the student uses the word “different.”

**New School Safety** – the student describes issues of safety at their new school.

- Evacuation chairs – the student describes concerns or issues with evacuation chairs
- Gangs – The student indicates that gangs are present in the school or community
- Violence – The student describes violence in the school or community
- Safer – The student indicates that the new school is safer than SCHOOL NAME DELETED

**New School Physical Space** – the student refers to aspects of the physical space at their new school.

- Bigger school/classes – The student indicates that the new school has bigger classes or is bigger than SCHOOL NAME



DELETED . To be used only when the student uses the words “school” or “classes.”

- More/Better space – the student indicates that the new school has more space or better space but is not specific as to whether they are referring to the whole school or classes, or clearly indicates another space in the school (Ex. “bigger hallways” “better space”)
- Bathroom – the student describes the bathrooms at the new school.
- Gym – the student describes the gym at the new school. (If the student describes the Gym as inaccessible, double code with “Accessibility.”)
- New building – the student indicates that the new school is a new building.

**Schedule/Commute** – the student refers to their schedule or to the commute to/from school.

- Bussing – the student describes concerns or issues regarding taking the bus to school
- Closer – the student indicates that the new school is closer than SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- Farther – the student indicates that the new school is farther than SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- Earlier – the student explains that they either get to school or leave school earlier than he/she did at SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- Passing periods – the student describes issues/concerns related to the periods between classes.
- Late – the student indicates that they have been late to school, class, or that they leave school later than they did at SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- Commute time – the student refers to the time it takes for him/her to get to his/her new school.

**Accessibility** – the student describes issues or concerns related to accessibility at their new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED .

- Disabilities not understood – The student indicates that disabilities are not understood in the new school. Can be a certain group or person that fails to understand, or that the school generally does not understand.
- Ramps – the student describes accessibility related to ramps at the new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- Elevators – the student describes accessibility related to elevators at the new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- Wheelchair issues – the student mentions wheelchair (whether referring directly to accessibility or not).
- Classes – the student describes accessibility within classrooms at the new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED

- Doors – the student describes accessibility in terms of doors (too narrow, automatic, too heavy, etc.) at the new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- Hallway – the student describes accessibility in the hallways at the new school or SCHOOL NAME DELETED (if the student describes hallways as wider or larger, double code with *More/Better Space*.)

**Old School** – the student refers to SCHOOL NAME DELETED in a response.

- Don't miss – the student indicates that she/he does not miss SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- Miss/Liked SCHOOL NAME DELETED – the student indicates that she/he misses or liked SCHOOL NAME DELETED
- SCHOOL NAME DELETED problems – the student describes or indicates that there were problems at SCHOOL NAME DELETED .
- More fun – the student describes SCHOOL NAME DELETED as more fun than the new school.
- Easier – the student describes the academics at SCHOOL NAME DELETED as easier or less challenging than those at the new school.

**Freedom** – the student describes issues or concerns regarding their freedom, such as choices, rules, or privileges.

- More freedom – the student mentions having more or wanting more choices or privileges (at SCHOOL NAME DELETED or new school).
- Limited freedom – the student describes limits to her/his freedom, choices or privileges (either at SCHOOL NAME DELETED or the new school)
- ID – the student mentions student identification as an issue affecting their freedom
- Dress code – the student indicates that the new school's dress code affects her/his freedom.
- Too many rules – the student indicates that there are too many rules.

**Discipline** – the student refers to discipline at their new school or at SCHOOL NAME DELETED .

- Trouble – the student mentions being in “trouble”
- Academic probation – the student indicates that she/he have been placed on or threatened with academic probation.
- Detention – the student indicates that she/he has received detention or been threatened with detention.

**Nothing** – the student indicates that the answer to the question is negative or nothing (Ex. “no,” “nothing good,” “don't know,” “nothing”)

**Emotions** – the student describes an emotion they have/are experiencing.

- Angry – the student indicates that she/he has experienced anger

- Bored – the student indicates that she/he has experienced boredom
- Worry – the student indicates that she/he has experienced worry
- Excited – the student indicates that she/he has been excited
- Happy – the student indicates that she/he has been happy
- Excluded – the student indicates that she/he has felt excluded

**Misc:**

- Lost personal items – the student indicates that she/he has lost a personal item.
- Car wash – the student indicates that she/he has been working in a car wash through the school.
- Misunderstood – the student indicates that she/he has felt misunderstood in their new school.
- Girls – the student describes “girls” as an important part of their experience at the new school.

## APPENDIX G: THE TEACHER DATA CODEBOOK

### Teacher Survey on Individual Students

Codebook 10/01/07

#### Academics

*Academic Problems* – student difficulties performing academic work.

*Doesn't Do Work* – student complete assigned work

Ex: Doesn't do his work; He still doesn't do his work

*Failing* – student is failing

Ex: She is currently failing her class; Student is failing due to absence

*Not Understanding* – student academic problems due to lack of understanding

Ex: He wasn't understanding the assignments; He doesn't seem to understand what's going on

*Poor Work* – the teacher feels that the student demonstrates poor work at school (*Not accountable, not focusing, unprepared, etc.*)

Ex: not accountable, not focusing, unprepared

*Academic Achievement* – Student's academic achievement meets and/or exceeds teacher standards

Ex: Academic progress, receiving an A in this class

*Likes School* - Student enjoys attending school

Ex: He likes SCHOOL NAME DELETED

*Receiving help* – student is receiving academic assistance, such as tutoring

Ex: Student has a teacher aide that comes with him to class most days to help him with the class work

#### Aide

*Aide Helping* – Student aide is giving the assistance the student needs

Ex: Teacher aide helps Michael understand what is expected of him

*Needs Aide* - Student aide is needed

Ex: She needs an aide for classroom work

*Problem w/ Aide* – Problems with the student aide providing sufficient assistance (i.e. scheduling problems)

Ex: Problem with aide

#### Attendance

*Poor Attendance* - Student is not attending school/class to the teacher's satisfaction

Ex: Attendance poor, which creates problems

*Absent* - Student is absent from class

Ex: He is absent at least twice a week, and I never see a reinstatement; Absences due to illness

*Late* - Student is late to class

Ex: Lateness to class due to elevator

*Good Attendance* - Student is attending school/class to the teacher's satisfaction

Ex: Tyrone has good attendance; she has good attendance

*Unable to Attend* - Student is not attending school/class because they are not able to attend (i.e. medical problems, inaccessible classroom, etc.)

Ex: [student name deleted] has been unable to attend school due to her medical issues

### **Behavior**

*Behavior Problems*— student is behaving in ways that are viewed as problematic to the teacher (i.e. *Arguing, Challenges Authority, Teasing*)

Ex: George challenges authority in inappropriately resulting in suspension. His classroom behavior is also inappropriate

*Worse over Time* – student behavior problems have become worse over time.

Ex: ...getting into more trouble now.

*No Change* – student behavior problems have not changed.

Ex: He has not got better.

*Improved Behavior* – student behavior has improved over time.

Ex: Terrance's behavior has improved since the calls home

### **Medical/Health**

*Health problems* – student has health problems

Ex: unable to attend school due to her medical issues

*Homebound* – student is/was/will receive homebound services

Ex: On homebound since school started

*Medical Services* – student is receiving medical services

Ex: Continued medical and homebound services

*Hospitalized* – student is/was/will be hospitalized

Ex: Samantha is currently being hospitalized

*O. T.* – student is receiving occupational therapy

Ex: OT has discussed w me keyboarding time

*P.T.* – student is receiving physical therapy

Ex: There have been PT issues; her walker wasn't transferred from SCHOOL NAME DELETED to King and she has just brought her walker from home to start therapy

*Respite Care.* – Student's family receives respite care

Ex: Apparently, she is going to contact the state about respite care

### **Mobility/Accessible (Including Scheduling Issues)**

*Assistive Technology* – student needs/has/will have assistive technology

Ex: Elvis's parents were concerned with some assistive technology

*Classroom inaccessible.* – Problems for student accessing classroom

Ex: Shatoya sat in a classroom for 5 wks w/out instruction because there were 1) physical problems-room could not accommodate her chair

*Elevator issues* – problems with functioning of school elevator

Ex: Elevator issues remain major

*Extra transition time.* – Student given extra time to get to classes

Ex: extra time to go to and from classes

*Extra-curricular issues.* – Problems for student accessing extra-curricular activities

Ex: Integration into extracurricular classes

*Walker issues* – problems for student using walker at school

Ex: her walker wasn't transferred from SCHOOL NAME

DELETED to King and she has just brought her walker from home to start therapy

*Personal care* – assistance for student with personal care needs, such as *Toileting, Dressing, and Feeding*

Ex: toileting & dressing assistance issues

*Technology inaccessible* – problems for student accessing school technology, such as a school computer

Ex: Computer program not compatible with her needs

*Transportation issues* – problems for student accessing services due to bus transportation

Ex: Transportation issues; bussing issues

*Wheelchair issues* – problems for student using wheelchair at school

Ex: There was also a concern about an electric wheelchair

### **Issue Status**

*Issue not addressed* – no action has been taken to resolve the issue(s).

Ex: Number 1 and 3 have not been addressed

*No issues*– There are no issues for this student

Ex: No issues that I know of

*Ongoing*– issues are currently being addressed in the school but are not yet resolved

Ex: These issues are still being addressed

*Resolved* – issues have not been resolved by the school, or have diminished over time. Use only when phrase “resolved” is used.

Ex: Issues have been resolved

### **Parents/Family**

*Parents/positive* – family is mentioned by teacher for positive reasons (*Family helps, Parents happy, etc.*)

Ex: His parents are so happy he is here; Her parent and sister work with her and help her complete homework.

*Parents/negative*– family is mentioned by teacher for negative reasons (*Parents concerned,*

*Parents unavailable, etc.*)

Ex: Parent apprehensive about change; parent unavailable for I.E.P.

### **Participation**

*Can't participate*— student cannot participate in classroom activities

Ex: Could not participate in computer class.

*Not participating*— student will not participate in classroom activities

Ex: Student does not participate in class.

*Participating*— student participates in classroom activities

Ex: Participates in classroom activities with a positive attitude.

### **Relationships**

*Friendships*— student friendships are important according to the teacher (*Missing friends, No friends, Making friends, etc*)

Ex: He seems to have a lot of friends; Missing some old friends

*Social*— student interacts with peers and/or adults; also includes being liked, getting along, and working well.

Ex: Student socializes with his “SCHOOL NAME DELETED ” friends on a regular basis

*Social Problems* – student does not interact with peers and/or adults, or has difficulty fitting in

Ex: challenged in more difficult social situations, shy

### **School Response**

*Inclusion Events* – the school has event to include students with disabilities

Ex: some sort of event(s) be planned to get inclusion students/teachers together with Special Ed teachers/students.

*Need CPS Assistance*— CPS assistance is needed to solve the problem the student has

Ex: need CPS assistance

*Teacher Support*— student receives academic, social, or emotional support from the teacher

Ex: Assuring student verbally that he has friends and others that care for him as a friend

*Communication*— issue is/was/will be/ could be addressed with communication between key people

Ex: Her mother and I are in frequent communication via telephone.

*Counseling*— counseling from a professional counselor is/was/will be/ could be used to address the issue. Includes counseling from social workers or psychologists

Ex: I have asked the counselor to speak to [NAME DELETED]

*One-On-One*— issue is/was/will be/ could be addressed with one-on-one communication between the teacher and student

Ex: getting more one on one help

*Training*— issue is/was/will be/ could be addressed with training for teachers or other school staff

Ex: we had training on proper techniques last week.

*Discipline*— issue is/was/will be/ could be addressed with disciplinary action by the school (*Warnings, Behavior plans, Failure Notices, Removal, Suspension, etc.*)

Ex: gave warnings; failure notice; currently on a behavior plan; suspension.

*Incentives*— issue is/was/will be/ could be addressed with the use of incentives for good behavior

Ex: Positive reinforcement that he is doing well at this school.

*Academic Response*

*Class Options/Changed* – issue is/was/will be/could be addressed by providing/changing more/different class options

Ex: He got a schedule change

*Appropriate Placement* – student is placed in classes that are reflective of his/her abilities

Ex: Academic level of student and the appropriate placement, which would allow him to achieve at his maximum level

*Lowered Academic Expectations* – teachers tailor the students' education by having fewer expectations with regards to academic performance.

Ex: Teachers lowered the reading level and class expectations to match his level.

*Books* – issues as a result of losing/misplacing/not having a book; issue solved with finding/replacing/giving extra copies

Ex: was given two copies of the textbook.

*Special Ed. Services* – taking the students out of the classroom to receive individualized services that reg. ed. Students do not need

Ex: Providing the special ed services to meet her needs.

*Combined Classes* – student's classes have both reg. ed. Students and students with disabilities

Ex: Student (+ class) is combined w/reg ed classes for library + music, + soon, gym. Student activities w/K class.

*IEP Progress* – change/improvement in student's individualized education plan

Ex: He has also made great progress on his IEP goals!

*Mainstreamed* – student is integrated for the most part with reg. ed. Students but is still receiving special ed. services

Ex: She is mainstreamed for specials and she listens/responds so much!

*Paired with peer* – student is partnered with another student to help one another academically.

Ex: Richard started working with another friend as partners on worksheets.

### **Student Variable**

*Emotions*— mention of the student's emotions

*Positive Emotion*—the student experiences positive emotions (e.g. is happy)



Ex: happy, smiles

*Negative Emotion*—the student experiences negative emotions (e.g., is depressed) Does not include withdrawn (see “not social”)

Ex: depressed, scared, nervous

*Positive Student Traits*— mention of student traits that are positive

Ex: Funny, Gifted, Independent, Inquisitive, Kind, Motivated, Own Advocate, Proud, etc.

## **Transition/Adjustment**

### *Student Adjustment*

*Adjusted*—the student is adapting to new school. Used only when the teacher uses the word “adjust” or “adapt”

Ex: She has adjusted well to the change

*Difficulty Adjusting* - the student is not adapting to new school. Used only when the teacher uses the word “adjust”

Ex: Edwin is having difficulty adjusting to a large environment

*Safe haven* - the new school or classroom is described as a place of safety/security for the student

Ex: He is coming to the Sp ed. office less per day it is a safe haven for him.

*Sense of community* - the student is described as feeling as though they belong and fit in at the school

Ex: He has managed to maintain a “sense of community” due to the presence of those he knew at his previous school.

### *School Adjustment*

*Inclusion* - the mention of efforts/problems with inclusion. Used only when the teacher uses the word “inclusion”

Ex: inclusion

*Smooth transition* – the transition is described as having few or no problems

Ex: She is making a smooth transition-she is adjusting well.

*Staff transfer* – Discussion of the transfer of staff from SCHOOL NAME DELETED to the new school

Ex: She likes her aide from SCHOOL NAME DELETED .

*School Transition Problem* – problems that have arisen during the transition within the school as an organization.

Ex: being placed in a class with “8 special needs students”

Boundary: Anytime transition issue is brought up, it cannot be about student adjustment.